

\$ THE SUNDAY TIMES



Many rules, fewer visitors

Pulau Ubin islanders say curbs on fishing, campfires and even hammocks are hurting business. NParks says the rules protect people and wildlife **A6&7**

INSIGHT

Why can't we shake off our reliance on foreign workers? **B4&5**



This bonsai cost \$20,000 **C4&5**



JEREMY AU YONG

Should ISIS brides be allowed to return home? **B2**



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Breaking the bias against private grads **A10** | Hanoi gets ready for Trump-Kim summit **A18**



US, China say deal to end trade dispute likely

Beijing team's extended Washington stay seen as good sign; Trump 'may meet Xi next month'

Charissa Yong
US Correspondent
In Washington

Signs are pointing to an agreement between the United States and China on resolving their current trade dispute. The Chinese trade delegation has decided to extend its stay in Washington where the current round of trade talks are being held, a move Chinese experts said clearly indicated significant progress in the talks.

US President Donald Trump has also said that he may meet his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping next month to finalise a trade deal that is "more likely" to happen than not.

The latest round of US-Chinese trade talks was originally scheduled to wrap up last Friday, but went so well that the Chinese negotiators extended their stay and will con-

tinue meeting their US counterparts through the weekend.

"I would say it's more likely that a deal will happen," Mr Trump told reporters at the Oval Office before his meeting with the Chinese trade delegation, led by Chinese Vice-Premier Liu He. "The fact that they're willing to stay for a quite-a-bit-longer period, doubling the time, that means something."

Mr Trump also said he remained open to extending the March 1 deadline for negotiators to reach an agreement, failing which US tariffs on US\$200 billion (S\$270 billion) of Chinese goods will be raised from 10 to 25 per cent, if he saw substantial progress being made.

He added that his meeting with Mr Xi would probably take place at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, where both met in April 2017.

The US and China have also sealed a deal on currency manipula-

tion, said Mr Trump, who declined to give further details.

Mr Liu was also quoted as saying that a deal was "very likely", adding that there was positive progress on the issues of trade balance, agriculture, technology transfer, intellectual property protection and financial services. The news on Friday suggested that low-hanging fruit such as reducing the US-China trade deficit had been plucked, and the remaining challenges were much harder.

"It sounds like the easy wins have been made," wrote China commentator Bill Bishop in Axios news website. "The Chinese have resisted significant concessions and it's not clear what leverage the US President wants to use before March 1 to convince them to move much more."

Said Mr Trump: "Ultimately, I think the biggest decisions and some even smaller decisions will be made by President Xi and myself. And we expect to have a meeting some point in the not too distant future and I can only say talks are going along well, but we're going to have to see what happens."

The US and China are negotiating to resolve a trade dispute centred on China's alleged unfair trade practices, including forced technology transfers and market access, and the US' trade deficit with China.

Mr Xi, in a message read out at the Oval Office on Friday, said he was pleased to note the economic teams had engaged in intense talks and made significant progress since he and Mr Trump met in Argentina last November after the G-20 summit.

"This has been well received in both our countries and in the wider international community. It is my hope that our two sides will continue to work together in a spirit of mutual respect and... cooperation and could redouble our efforts so as to meet each other halfway and reach an agreement that works for our mutual benefit," said the Chinese President in the message.

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SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A4

SCOOT SAYS SORRY



'We've heard the feedback loudly and clearly... and we humbly acknowledge that we have had several failings.'

Scoot CEO Lee Lik Hsin says being a budget airline is no excuse for disruptions, and wants to win back confidence.

TOP OF THE NEWS A8

S'pore seeks injunction in US against Brochez

Mikhy Farrera Brochez, the American wanted in Singapore for leaking personal information of individuals with HIV, has been charged in a Kentucky court with the possession and unlawful transfer of stolen identification documents.

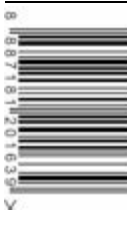
Singapore's Ministry of Health (MOH) has also sought an injunction from the US court to prevent further disclosure of the confidential data Brochez had obtained from the Singapore Government, and to get him to return the information.

The MOH, in a joint statement with the Singapore Police Force, yesterday said the Singapore authorities have filed a civil suit against Brochez in the US courts.

On Friday, Brochez was charged following investigations by the Fed-

eral Bureau of Investigation, said the US Department of Justice in a press release. Brochez is scheduled to appear at a federal courthouse in Lexington on Wednesday.

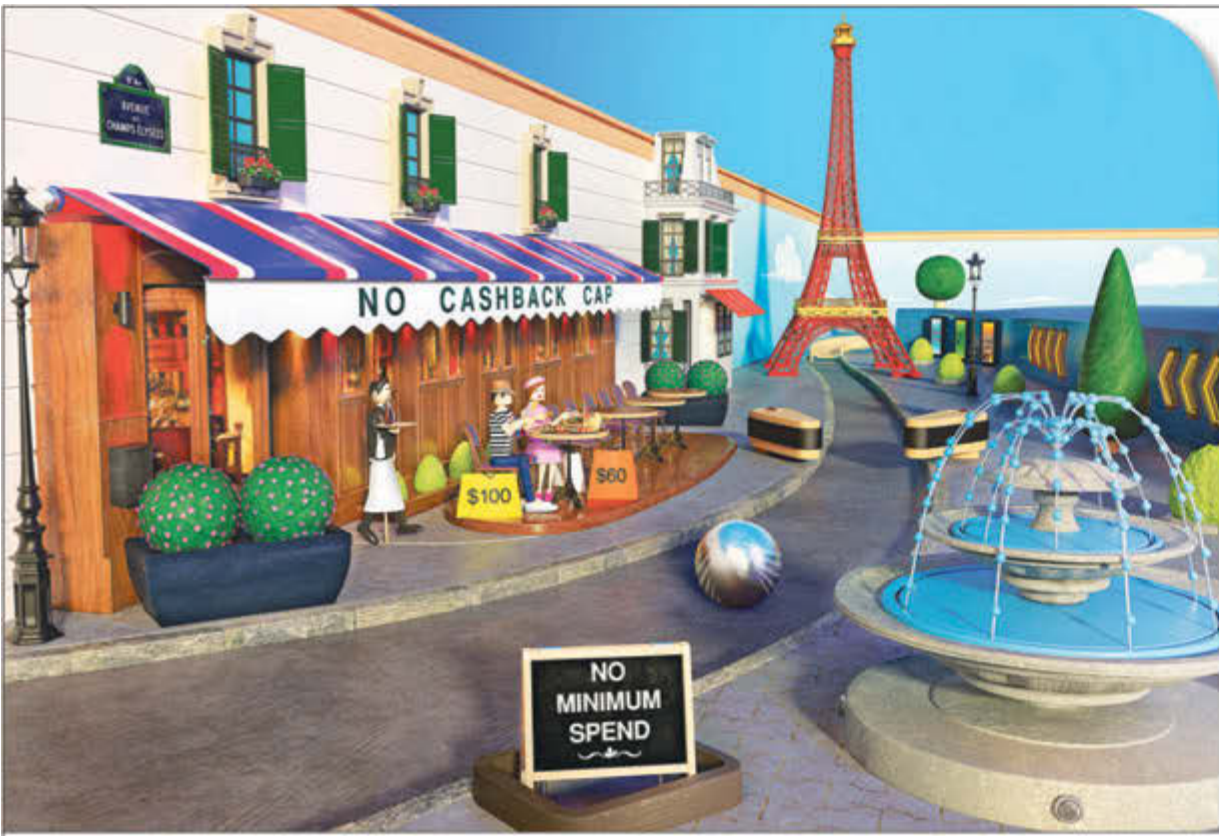
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MINISTER FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY CHAN CHUN SING, on the Budget being called an "election Budget".

Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing with Mr Sam Tan (standing), Minister of State for Social and Family Development and Foreign Affairs and chairman of government feedback and engagement unit Reach, at the Budget dialogue yesterday. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

Focus on Govt's total social spending: Chan Chun Sing

Instead of universal welfare, he says, Govt has opted for targeted mode to help most vulnerable

Lim Min Zhang

Look at the Government's total social spending each year, rather than the amount spent on packages such as that for the Merdeka Generation, Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing said yesterday.

And while some have called for a universal welfare scheme, Mr Chan said the Government has opted for a targeted approach that helps society's most vulnerable.

He was speaking at a public Bud-

get feedback session where he was responding to a commentary by sociologist Teo You Yenn published in The Straits Times last Friday.

At the session held at the National Press Centre near Clarke Quay involving about 100 members of the public, Mr Chan answered questions on Budget announcements, ranging from whether the Merdeka Generation Package was sustainable to why there was a need to reduce dependence on S Pass foreign workers.

The Merdeka Generation Pack-

age, for people born in the 1950s, is expected to cost the Government more than \$8 billion, with \$6.1 billion set aside for the package during this year's Budget.

About 500,000 Singaporeans will receive benefits such as Medi-save top-ups and additional subsidies for outpatient care for life.

In her commentary last Friday, Associate Professor Teo called for the introduction of a set of welfare principles so that all future cohorts of Singaporeans may enjoy "peace of mind and a sense of security".

"Introducing one-off, cohort-based rewards is, arguably, not a principled, sustainable, or solidarity-enhancing way to protect people in retirement," wrote Prof Teo,

who is head of sociology at the Nanyang Technological University.

But Mr Chan said the Government provides "structural support" to the people, and that base, in terms of social spending, is more than 40 per cent of the budget every year in areas such as education and healthcare.

He said the Merdeka package, unveiled in last Monday's Budget speech, was the "icing on top of the cake" to help the most vulnerable.

"And it's also an expression of our values that whenever we have some extra resources, we care for those who have contributed to Singapore the most, those who are most in need," he said. "By sharing it equally, actually, we don't give as

much help as we would like to those who need it the most."

On why there is not a simpler, universal scheme – instead of one that involves means testing – he said an across-the-board policy would not be fair as it could apply to all, regardless of income.

He acknowledged that means testing has implications, such as people comparing the amount of subsidies they receive.

"Of course, we agree that everyone should have peace of mind, that's one of the aims of the Government. But it should be done in a more targeted manner, rather than across the board."

The three-hour feedback session, conducted in Mandarin, was organised by radio station 96.3 Hao FM and Reach, the Government's feedback and engagement arm.

Mr Sam Tan, who is Minister of State for Social and Family Development and Foreign Affairs, and Reach chairman, was also present.

Participants discussed how they would spend a hypothetical \$10 million sum for the country, in five areas such as security, social spending and savings.

They also had a question-and-answer session with the ministers.

Mr Chan also made the case for the need to lower the cap on the number of S Pass workers companies can hire for the next two years – from 15 per cent now to 13 per cent from Jan 1 next year, and to 10 per cent from Jan 1, 2021. These workers are mid-skilled foreigners earning at least \$2,300 a month.

He explained that Singaporeans do not typically do the jobs that Work Permit holders do, adding that Employment Pass professionals make up the minority of foreign workers here, and S Pass holders compete the most with middle-class Singaporeans.

"If we don't control the growth of S Pass workers, then the ones to bear the brunt first are middle-class Singaporeans," he said.

Earlier yesterday, Senior Minister of State for Defence and Foreign Affairs Maliki Osman hosted a separate feedback session for Malay residents in East Coast GRC and Fengshan. At the annual session at Siglap Community Centre, participants discussed Budget announcements such as the Bicentennial Bonus.

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TIME	25 FEB 2019 (Monday)	26 FEB 2019 (Tuesday)	27 FEB 2019 (Wednesday)
11.00pm to 12.00pm		NR Nobel™: An Innovative Breakthrough in the Field of Life Extension and Longevity in Cosmetics by AVIV International Pte Ltd	Nano Hair Restoration by H-Plus (S) Pte Ltd
12.00pm to 1.00pm	Increase Profitability and Productivity with Microneedling, Plasma and Clinical Module Care for Professionals by Meijo Skincare Wellness	Increase Profitability and Productivity with Microneedling, Plasma and Clinical Module Care for Professionals by Meijo Skincare Wellness	Increase Profitability and Productivity with Microneedling, Plasma and Clinical Module Care for Professionals by Meijo Skincare Wellness
1.00pm to 2.00pm	3D Aesthetics Solutions via AI Technology by HRS Technology Pte Ltd	3D Aesthetics Solutions via AI Technology by HRS Technology Pte Ltd	DR. HOU & LING Double Extracts Diamond White Essence by Jing Rui Biotechnology - Cai En International Ltd
2.00pm to 3.00pm	The Most Advanced Reproduction Beauty in Japan by Beauty Planning Inc.	TOKI SKIN: The Japanese Way to Naturally Beautiful, Porcelain Skin by Lit Botanica Pte Ltd	3D Aesthetics Solutions via AI Technology by HRS Technology Pte Ltd
3.00pm to 4.00pm	Miraculous Non Surgical Face Lift by FABLife Pte Ltd	DR. HOU & LING LIPOFORM Bust Plus Lotion by Jing Rui Biotechnology - Cai En International Ltd	Your Skills Your Future: Latest Government Subsidy Beauty Courses 2019 by SOQ Biz Hub Pte Ltd
4.00pm to 5.00pm	NR Nobel™: An Innovative Breakthrough in the Field of Life Extension and Longevity in Cosmetics by AVIV International Pte Ltd	The Myth of Japanese Cosmetics, 'NAHLS' by Deep Impact Co., Ltd.	NR Nobel™: An Innovative Breakthrough in the Field of Life Extension and Longevity in Cosmetics by AVIV International Pte Ltd
5.00pm to 6.00pm	Nano Hair Restoration by H-Plus (S) Pte Ltd	Miraculous Non Surgical Face Lift by FABLife Pte Ltd	Self-Defence Power - Our Body's Inherent Ability to Heal by Nature Produce
6.00pm to 7.00pm	Self-Defence Power - Our Body's Inherent Ability to Heal by Nature Produce	Nano Hair Restoration by H-Plus (S) Pte Ltd	

WORKSHOP PROGRAMME			
TIME	25 FEB 2019 (Monday)	26 FEB 2019 (Tuesday)	27 FEB 2019 (Wednesday)
11.30pm to 12.30pm	3D Aesthetics Solutions via AI Technology by HRS Technology Pte Ltd		
12.30pm to 1.30pm	7 Minutes Miracle Face Lift by FABLife Pte Ltd	7 Minutes Miracle Face Lift by FABLife Pte Ltd	
1.30pm to 2.30pm	Nano Hair Restoration by H-Plus (S) Pte Ltd	Nano Hair Restoration by H-Plus (S) Pte Ltd	Nano Hair Restoration by H-Plus (S) Pte Ltd
2.30pm to 3.30pm	The Best Body Contouring Tech of Both Worlds: NobleShape with LD+AMF+RF by Aesthetics Marketing Asia Pte Ltd	Add a Whole New Dimension to your AGASSI - The Latest RF Smile Lifting & Vaginal Tightening Concept! by Aesthetics Marketing Asia Pte Ltd	Bio-Jet - The Next Generation of Needle-Free Transdermal Drug Delivery Concept! by Aesthetics Marketing Asia Pte Ltd
3.30pm to 4.30pm	2 Weeks to Brighter, Even and Younger Looking Skin with the Power of Po3™. The Light Serum by 28Cubed by NamZ Pte Ltd	3D Aesthetics Solutions via AI Technology by HRS Technology Pte Ltd	3D Aesthetics Solutions via AI Technology by HRS Technology Pte Ltd
4.30pm to 5.30pm		5 Most Effective Meridian Point for Natural Face Lifting by SOQ Biz Hub Pte Ltd	5 Most Effective Meridian Point for Natural Face Lifting by SOQ Biz Hub Pte Ltd

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The Health Ministry revealed on Jan 28 that American Mikhy Farrera Brochez got hold of the details of 14,200 people diagnosed with HIV here since 1985, and leaked the data, which included their names, contact details and medical information. He has denied the allegations. Brochez has been charged in a Kentucky court with the possession and unlawful transfer of stolen identification documents. PHOTO: ARDEN BARNES FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES



PROTECTING INDIVIDUALS AFFECTED

The Singapore authorities are aware that Brochez has been arrested and charged in court in Kentucky, USA. The Singapore authorities have been working closely with our US counterparts. Concurrently, we have also filed civil proceedings in the US courts, and are doing everything we can to protect the interests of the individuals affected.



THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND THE SINGAPORE POLICE FORCE IN A JOINT STATEMENT

MOH takes legal action in US against Brochez

It seeks to prevent further disclosure, and the return, of HIV data the American has stolen

Hariz Baharudin

The Ministry of Health (MOH) is taking legal action in the United States courts against American Mikhy Farrera Brochez to re-acquire the stolen HIV Registry data in his possession.

In two separate statements yesterday, the MOH first said it had filed civil proceedings in the US courts before elaborating later that it has sought an injunction from the US courts to “prevent further disclosure of the confidential information that Mikhy Brochez had obtained from the Singapore Government, and to get him to return the information”.

These moves came shortly after the US Justice Department said last Friday that Brochez had been investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and was charged in a Kentucky court with the possession and unlawful transfer of stolen identification documents.

Brochez, 34, was named by the MOH last month as the culprit who leaked online the personal information of 14,200 individuals with HIV.

In a news release last Friday, the US Attorney’s Office, Eastern District of Kentucky, said: “The criminal complaint alleges that Farrera-Brochez illegally possessed and intended to distribute data containing sensitive medical and other identifying information.

“While living in the Eastern District of Kentucky, Farrera Brochez sent links to the data from his e-mail account to several news outlets. He also sent e-mails to several government officials in Singapore containing links to the data.”

Hours later, the MOH and Singapore Police Force said in a joint statement: “The Singapore authorities are aware that Brochez has been arrested and charged in court in Kentucky, USA. The Singapore authorities have been working closely with our US counterparts.

“Concurrently, we have also filed civil proceedings in the US courts, and are doing everything we can to protect the interests of the individuals affected.”

MOH revealed on Jan 28 that Brochez got hold of the details of 14,200 people diagnosed with HIV here since 1985, and leaked the data, which included their names, contact details and medical information. He has denied the allegations.

Brochez lived in Singapore from 2008 before being jailed in 2017 for fraud and drug-related offences and lying to the Manpower Ministry about his HIV status to get an employment pass. He was released from prison last April and deported.

In Parliament this month, Singapore’s Health Minister Gan Kim Yong said police will “spare no effort” in bringing Brochez to justice.

The Straits Times had earlier reported that a tricky process lay

ahead in seeking Brochez’s return to Singapore, as he is not the subject of an arrest warrant here nor is he facing charges under the Official Secrets Act.

MOH’s decision to seek an injunction is one of several legal options the authorities could pursue after filing civil proceedings, lawyers The Sunday Times spoke to said.

Hilborne Law managing director Rajan Supramaniam said these could be claims for damages, intrusion into a person’s privacy or defamation.

Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan said: “It is unlikely that the authorities here will be suing him for damages, because compensation will be grossly inadequate for the distress and anguish caused. What is precious are the stolen records, and the imperative is to compel him to return what he has stolen, so that further leaks are prevented.”

Last Monday, Brochez was in court to face trespassing charges, after having been arrested last December for refusing to leave his mother’s home in Clark County in Winchester, Kentucky.

The Sunday Times understands Brochez is being detained at the request of the US government, pending the outcome of the stolen data case. He will appear before a judge in Kentucky on Wednesday to determine if he should continue to be detained while the case is pending.

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• Additional reporting by Charissa Yong

TIMELINE

April 2016: Mikhy Farrera Brochez is arrested for repeatedly refusing to take a blood test. He gives the authorities a list of 75 names and particulars from the HIV Registry.

June: Charged with offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act, Penal Code and Infectious Diseases Act.

March 2017: Convicted and jailed for 28 months, inclusive of time served in remand since June 2016.

April 2018: Released from prison and deported.

May: Brochez sends a screenshot to government authorities containing the details of 31 persons found to be among the original 75 names he disclosed in 2016. MOH makes police report and contacts the 31 individuals. At this point, the 31 records do not appear to have been disclosed publicly.

Dec 8: Brochez is arrested for criminal trespass at the home of his mother Teresa King in Clark County of Winchester, Kentucky, in the United States.

January 2019: MOH becomes aware that he probably still possesses the entire HIV Registry. He puts the information online and provides the link to a non-government party.

Feb 17: The Singapore Prison Service lodges a police report against Brochez for sending a list of 13 HIV-positive inmates to some government authorities and media organisations.

The e-mail sent the previous day contained photos of a piece of paper listing identification numbers of 13 inmates – including himself – who were scheduled for a medical check-up on March 28, 2018 at Changi Prison Complex.

Feb 18: Brochez pleads not guilty to a charge of criminal trespass on his mother’s property.

Feb 22: The US Department of Justice announces that Brochez has been charged in a Kentucky court with possession and unlawful transfer of stolen identification documents.

Feb 23: Singapore says it is seeking an injunction from the US courts to stop Brochez from further disclosure of the confidential information and to return the information.

Brochez faces jail, fine if found guilty in the US

Mikhy Farrera Brochez could be fined or jailed if he is found guilty of the charges filed against him by the US Department of Justice on Friday.

The charges come under Section 1028(a) of the US Code, which covers fraud and related activity in connection with identification documents, authentication features and information.

The unlawful transfer of stolen identification documents is defined as the transfer of an identification document, authentication feature, or a false identification document, while knowing that such document or feature was stolen or produced without lawful authority. The definition of an identification document covers documents made or issued by or under the authority of a foreign government, according to the US Code.

Moreover, an authentication feature can be defined as a sequence of numbers or letters, which would include NRIC numbers.

Brochez could be fined, jailed for up to five years, or both, if convicted of the unlawful transfer of stolen identification documents.

The charge of possession with intent to distribute is defined as knowingly possessing with intent to use unlawfully or transfer unlawfully five or more identification documents, authentication features, or false identification documents.

This charge also carries a fine, jail term of up to five years, or both.

If convicted, Brochez will also be ordered by the court to forfeit and destroy or dispose of all illicit authentication features, identification documents, or means of identification in his possession.

Charissa Yong

Brochez could be fined, jailed for up to five years, or both, if convicted of the unlawful transfer of stolen identification documents.

Extension of US-China trade talks an extremely good sign: Experts

Danson Cheong
China Correspondent
In Beijing

The fact that trade talks between the United States and China were extended for two days is an extremely good sign, and shows that both countries are increasingly close to striking a deal, Chinese analysts said.

They pointed to the positive signals that emerged from the meeting between US President Donald Trump and Chinese Vice-Premier Liu He in Washington on Friday.

Mr Liu, who is Chinese President Xi Jinping’s top economic adviser, is leading the delegation from Beijing at the two-day trade talks, which were originally scheduled to end on Friday.

Mr Liu, when asked by reporters if a deal was likely, said: “From China, we believe that is very likely that it will happen and we hope that ultimately we’ll have a deal. And the Chinese side is ready to make its utmost effort.”

Mr Trump was equally positive,

saying there was a “good chance” a deal would be struck.

Dr Wang Huiyao, president of the Beijing-based Centre for China and Globalisation think-tank, said the fact that Mr Trump met the Chinese delegation, reciprocating Mr Xi’s meeting with the US trade delegation in Beijing a week earlier, was a “very good sign”.

“The fact is both the US and China are big countries that cannot do without each other. Trump is showing some openness and China should grasp this opportunity,” he said.

If a deal is struck, it could bring to an end the trade war between the two sides which has led to punitive tariffs on more than US\$360 billion (\$\$487 billion) worth of goods.

But the clock is ticking.

A 90-day trade truce agreed by both countries is due to end on March 1 although the US has signalled that the deadline could be extended. But Washington has also threatened that if no deal is reached by then, it would impose higher tariffs on US\$200 billion worth of Chinese imports.



US President Donald Trump in a meeting with China’s Vice-Premier Liu He (far left) in the White House’s Oval Office on Friday. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Beijing-based economist Hu Xingdou pegged the likelihood of a deal at above 80 per cent, but he also added that the most difficult discussions often lay at the end.

“There will definitely be more discussions in future to settle how to carry out any agreement.

“What both sides agree upon is likely going to be a broad framework agreement.”

In an editorial yesterday, the nationalist Global Times tabloid said that while both sides were “on track to reaching a comprehensive trade agreement”, any deal reached

would have to be made on the basis of equality.

“It is hoped that the two countries become rational and mature at a faster pace than the emergence and brewing of new problems. If they can reach a comprehensive trade agreement this time, it will

prove that rationality stands above conflicts,” the newspaper said.

On whether Huawei and ZTE would be part of any eventual agreement, Chinese experts said Mr Trump could offer an olive branch and adopt a softer position on the Chinese tech firms.

Huawei and ZTE are two of China’s largest makers of telecoms equipment.

The US has alleged that both companies are arms of the Chinese government and that their equipment could be used for spying.

Dr Wang said it was likely that Mr Trump would relax his position on Huawei, whose chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou is currently detained in Canada and facing extradition to the US for violating sanctions on Iran.

He pointed to how Mr Trump had lifted a US trade ban on ZTE last year, saving it from the brink of collapse.

“There is a good possibility that Trump might also show some goodwill with Huawei,” said Dr Wang.

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Developer: Florence Development Pte. Limited • Company registration no.: 2017305010 • Lot/ Mukim no.: Lot 09671C, 09673W 1/6 22 at Hougang Avenue 2 • Housing Developer's Licence no.: C1299 • Tenure of Land: Leasehold of 99 years commencing from 24 December 2018 • Encumbrances: Mortgage in favour of United Overseas Bank Ltd • Expected date of Vacant Possession: 31 March 2023 • Expected date of Legal Completion: 31 March 2026. Artist's impression. *Terms and conditions apply.

SAP schools still have important role, 40 years on: Ong Ye Kung

Hariz Baharudin

Forty years after being set up, Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools still have a role in Singapore, to help ensure that each student cohort has a core group with an intuitive understanding of Chinese culture and history, with language skills close to those in China, Taiwan or Hong Kong.

And while this is important in the

context of a fast-growing China, which is Singapore's largest trading partner, Education Minister Ong Ye Kung said that Malay and Tamil learning should be enhanced as well, with Indonesia, Malaysia and India also offering tremendous opportunities.

"Indeed, our programmes should seek to endow students with a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of our region, cultural heritage and languages. That is

what will give us a distinct and lasting identity, competitiveness, capability and confidence as a people," he said yesterday at the launch of a book marking the 40th anniversary of SAP schools.

"Take, for example, the Chinese, Malay and Tamil Language Elective Programmes at the post-secondary level. Schools such as Nanyang Junior College have run them well and made them its distinctive offering. We should review the pro-

grammes with a view to enhancing and improving them, across all our mother tongues."

SAP schools, established in 1979 during a period when enrolment for Chinese-medium schools fell, were set up to preserve the traditional Chinese school cultural environment. But things have changed since then, Mr Ong said.

Not only is the use of English even more common today, many young Singaporeans are less conscious of their ethnic identity, and there are also more specialised programmes to promote mother tongue learning such as the Language Elective Programmes for Chinese, Malay and Tamil.

"These developments have led some to question the relevance of SAP schools," he said. But he cau-

tioned against making "a drastic change to the SAP school system".

"The right thing to do is to preserve the programmes and institutions that promote the learning of our mother tongues and improve them where we can. We should be very careful not to undo any of these efforts, as that would be bucking the strategic trend at a time when it matters most."

He pointed out how Asia is now the world's fastest-growing region, and many other countries are stepping up the learning of multiple languages. "Today, it is common to meet PRC Chinese, Japanese or Koreans who speak fluent English, as it is common to meet Europeans, Americans or Australians who speak some Chinese. Bilingualism has been a unique advantage Singa-

pooreans have, but other countries are catching up, even surpassing us," he said at the book launch at the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre.

He also explained that SAP schools are a result of a balancing act which gives space for each community to achieve peaceful co-existence. "This is the case because we did not choose the path of ideological extremes – insisting that everyone is Singaporean and nothing else, or allowing every community to fully assert their cultural identities, leaving no common space for a Singaporean identity to grow in our young nation."

But he also said that more must be done to ensure that the students from SAP schools make friends from other communities.

"In my dialogue with SAP school



principals, they appreciated and valued this and, indeed, identified this as one of the major tasks for SAP schools. Today, SAP schools have good initiatives to promote intercultural learning. For example, Hong Wen School (a SAP school), Alexandra Primary and Radin Mas Primary jointly conduct art programmes and celebrate Racial Harmony Day together. Nanyang Girls works with Madrasah Aljunied to jointly organise activities during festive seasons and national events.

Mr Ong Ye Kung (centre) reciting a Chinese poem with Mr Baey Yam Keng and Ms Low Yen Ling at the launch of a book commemorating the 40th anniversary of SAP schools yesterday. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

"There is definitely room to do better. Because the objective is not just getting students to interact occasionally with students of other races, but also having the experience of growing up together with friends from all ethnic backgrounds, developing mutual trust, understanding our multi-cultural society and appreciating the adjustments that we have to make in order to maintain our social harmony and social cohesion."

Besides the commemorative book, a roving exhibition featuring the unique characteristics and contributions of SAP schools was launched yesterday as well. It will be staged in different SAP schools from next month to September.

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Saudi sisters fleeing family face deportation as deadline looms

HONG KONG • Two Saudi sisters trapped in Hong Kong say chronic physical abuse by male family members prompted them to flee the kingdom, where they now fear they will be forcibly returned.

The siblings are the latest example of Saudi women plotting their escape from the ultra-conservative kingdom only to find themselves dodging officials and angry family members at every turn, as the country battles criticism of its human rights record.

The women, aged 20 and 18, found themselves marooned after Saudi consular officials allegedly intercepted them during a stopover at the city's airport and later revoked their passports.

The pair, who have adopted the aliases Reem and Rawan, described a deeply unhappy upbringing in a middle-class Riyadh household.

They claim they were beaten by their father when they were young, and by their brothers when they got older, for small transgressions such as waking up late for prayer.

"They started to beat me... my father didn't really stop them. He thinks that this is what makes them men," Ms Reem told AFP.

They decided to bolt for freedom during a family holiday overseas, when their passports would be kept in their parents' bag instead of a safe – and when they would not need permission from a male guardian to travel abroad.

The opportunity arrived last September, when the family travelled to Sri Lanka for a vacation.

While their parents were sleeping, the sisters retrieved their passports and boarded a flight from Colombo to Hong Kong.

But trouble awaited them at the other end. They claim they were obstructed by several unknown men at the city's airport, including one who tried to trick them into boarding a plane back to Riyadh.

They said their onward flight booking to Melbourne, Australia was cancelled and later learnt the man was Saudi Arabia's consul general in Hong Kong.

The sisters suspect their father tracked their movements using Absheer, a controversial mobile app that operates as a portal to Saudi government services but also allows men to keep tabs on female relatives.

Fearing they were about to be "forcibly abducted", the sisters entered Hong Kong as visitors.

Hong Kong's Security Minister John Lee said on Friday that "police have received two separate reports, one regarding missing person(s) and one regarding request for investigation".

He declined to elaborate further.

The sisters' concerns deepened after they learnt from their lawyer that their passports were revoked in November, leaving them stateless.

But the sisters say they are fearful of being returned to Saudi Arabia.

"Either we will be killed because they want to clear (the) shame we brought as women who left by their own, or they will force us to marry... our cousins," said Ms Reem.

They say they have renounced Islam and fear the death penalty if they return home.

Apostasy or blasphemy is punishable with jail or death sentences in some Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia.

Such cases appear to be on the rise, with the sisters' story emerging a month after 18-year-old Saudi woman Rahaf Mohammed al-Qumun drew global attention with her dramatic escape from an allegedly abusive family, gaining refugee status in Canada.

Mr Michael Vidler, a lawyer for the pair, said the Hong Kong immigration authorities have indicated the pair would be "tolerated" in the city until Feb 28, after which they could be deported.

They are now hoping to be granted asylum elsewhere. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Ubin islanders, visitors say rules spoil business and fun; officials, others say they are necessary

Joyce Lim
Senior Correspondent

Since he was a teenager, Mr Mohamad Farhan Ahmad has made weekly trips to Pulau Ubin to fish and camp.

But after his last trip in March last year, the 47-year-old assistant engineer has not returned there. "In the past, my friends and I could pitch our tents anywhere, set up a campfire and cook, as though we were living in a kampung. We would all go home with a bucket full of fish," said Mr Farhan.

"It was an adventure."
"Now, we can't do as we like. There are designated spots for campfires. We also can't fish in the quarries now," added Mr Farhan, who now goes to Indonesia to fish.

Long a sanctuary for those seeking out a spot of unmanicured Singapore, Pulau Ubin, off the north-eastern corner of the mainland, attracts a mix of outdoor lovers, heritage fans and those harkening back to a slower pace of life. It is also home to Singapore's last remaining offshore community.

But Pulau Ubin villagers and visitors are chafing at "stricter rules" – from how they should deal with monkeys that enter their homes, to restrictions on where hammocks should be tied – since National Parks (NParks) took over as the island's central managing agent in June 2016.

Many of the rules, NParks says, have been around long before 2016, and they are there to protect wildlife and the safety of visitors and residents. What has changed is more effective enforcement.

The islanders – many of whom run businesses on the island – say this has resulted in a drop in visitors in recent years.

More no-fishing signs have also been erected around the island. Bike kiosk owners say NParks is very strict on making sure that they display their bikes within certain boundaries.

"Foreign visitors like to tie hammocks to the trees and have an afternoon nap. Now, they are told they can't do that as it would harm the trees," said a bicycle shop owner who wants to be known as only Mr Lim.

Interviews with 20 Pulau Ubin villagers and visitors throw up the same grouses. They include five boatmen who said their business has dropped by over half in the last two years.

Boatman Kit Kau Chye, 71, the chairman of Changi Point Ferry Association who has been operating his boat business for over 50 years, said the drop in visitorship came after management of Pulau Ubin was completely handed over to NParks.

He used to take seven to eight groups of anglers, each numbering five to eight people, to Pulau Ubin each weekend. Now, he gets only two groups.

Fishing enthusiast Billy Tan, 44, who has been visiting Pulau Ubin once a week in the past four years, said he was put off by new fences put up around the island which once had "many good fishing spots".

"And due to security reasons cited by the authorities, we now can't even go near the island to fish."

Mr Lee Ah Yong, 59, who helps to run Chew Teck Seng provision shop, said: "It's obvious visitorship has dropped. During my first Christmas working on Ubin in 2016, business was good. We had a turnover of \$1,500 just from selling drinks. In 2017, it dropped to \$500. Last year

saw a record low of \$200 to \$300." But the authorities dispute the fall in visits to the island.

In an interview with The Sunday Times, NParks' director of Pulau Ubin Robert Teo said the number of visitors had stabilised at 300,000 a year for several years. In 2010, the agency stopped tracking the numbers and NParks has "not observed any discernible drop in visitorship since". It is not clear how NParks arrived at this conclusion.

Mr Teo, 54, who has been working on Pulau Ubin since 1997, said that together with Friends of Ubin Network (FUN), a group of nature and heritage groups, academics and villagers, NParks had introduced programmes such as cycling and farm activities to court more visitors. With the help of volunteers, it organised over 350 educational and outreach events last year.

He said that many of the rules that the islanders are complaining of were already in place before 2016.

For example, due to safety concerns, fishing at the quarries and open fires in public spaces have not been permitted since the 1990s.

But now, there is stricter enforcement – since NParks took charge, overseeing functions ranging from nature conservation to the maintenance of infrastructure, he said.

Prior to 2016, the island was managed by a hodgepodge of agencies such as Singapore Land Authority and the National Environment Agency.

Said Mr Teo: "Under our Parks and Trees Regulations, there are regulations for use of parks for visitors. This is like everywhere else in Singapore. We have rules and regulations."

On the villagers' complaints, he said: "That's their feelings. But there are laws governing the land."

The conflict underscores the tightrope the officials walk in overseeing the island, given sometimes competing concerns like the islanders' livelihoods, what visitors want and protection of biodiversity.

Mr Albert Liu, 35, a civil servant who joined FUN as a volunteer in 2015, felt "it's perfectly sensible" for NParks to enforce its rules to protect the island.

"There's so much work that goes on behind the scenes to protect it. We can't allow anglers to fish anywhere they want. And I don't think the fences are put up to prevent anglers from fishing, but to protect people from falling into the quarries. It's for safety," he said.

"People who come to Ubin must share Ubin's values. You cannot bring your mentality of 'I can do what I want because *bo zhen hu* (no government)'. There are designated spots for camping and campfire."

Today, there are about 70 households or 100 people still living on Pulau Ubin, which once had 3,000 residents.

Bicycle shop owner Sit Chin Chwee, 66, said: "The authority needs to understand the meaning of kampung. Kampung should not have so many rules. We were doing well in the past. Why set so many rules now?"

Mr Sit said that monkeys are now "king" on the island as they are protected by NParks even when they break into homes to steal food.

"In the past, we can chase away the monkeys. We hit them so they don't dare to come near our homes. Now we are told we cannot hit the monkeys, so we make police re-



Mr Billy Tan (above, left) on a fishing trip to Pulau Ubin with his friends. The fishing enthusiast who has been visiting Pulau Ubin once a week in the past four years said he was put off by new fences put up around the island, which once had many good fishing spots. PHOTO: COURTESY OF MR BILLY TAN

Mr Robert Teo (right), NParks director of Pulau Ubin, said that many of the rules that the islanders are complaining about were already in place before 2016, except that there is stricter enforcement now, with NParks overseeing functions ranging from nature conservation to the maintenance of infrastructure. ST PHOTO: JOYCE LIM



ports about the monkeys," said Mr Sit.

"But the problem persists because the police don't arrest the monkeys or put them in jail."

On this, Mr Teo said NParks officers have visited islanders' homes and identified "solutions like

proper storage of food, securing the entry points and pruning of branches to discourage access by monkeys".

"This is similar to how we advise residents on the mainland on monkey issues," he said.

Mr Liu felt things on Pulau Ubin

have changed for the better since 2015, when he did a study of the island while pursuing a masters degree in biodiversity, conservation and management at the University of Oxford.

His research then found that there was a lack in initiatives to re-

talise the island's community.

Today, there are activities planned such as a Chinese New Year reunion of present and former islanders. Some of the kampung houses are also being restored by NParks, said Mr Liu.

"I love the island but I go once a

month and only on weekends. When I am there on weekends, it's bustling with life," said Mr Liu, who was surprised when told that islanders said visitorship has dropped.

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END TO OUR ADVENTURE

There are too many restrictions now. In the past, my friends and I could pitch our tents anywhere, set up a campfire and cook, as though we were living in a kampung. We would all go home with a bucket full of fish. It was an adventure. Now, we can't do as we like.

MR MOHAMAD FARHAN AHMAD, assistant engineer.

DON'T TIE HAMMOCKS TO THE TREES

Foreign visitors like to tie hammocks to the trees and have an afternoon nap. Now, they are told they can't do that as it would harm the trees.

MR LIM, bicycle shop owner.

SALE OF DRINKS HITS BOTTOM

During my first Christmas working on Ubin in 2016, business was good. We had a turnover of \$1,500 just from selling drinks. In 2017, it dropped to \$500. Last year saw a record low of \$200 to \$300.

MR LEE AH YONG, who helps to run a provision shop.

FED UP WITH MONKEY BUSINESS

In the past we can chase away the monkeys. We hit them so they don't dare to come near our homes. Now we are told we cannot hit the monkeys, so we make police reports about the monkeys. But the problem persists because the police don't arrest the monkeys or put them in jail.

MR SIT CHIN CHWEI, bicycle shop owner.

SAME AS RULES EVERYWHERE ELSE

Under our Parks and Trees Regulations, there are regulations for use of parks for visitors. This is like everywhere else in Singapore. We have rules and regulations.

MR ROBERT TEO, NParks' director of Pulau Ubin.

PROTECTING THE ISLAND

There's so much work that goes on behind the scenes to protect it... People who come to Ubin must share Ubin's values... There are designated spots for camping and campfire.

MR ALBERT LIU, civil servant.

Ubin islanders worry about 'no compensation' clause in contract

A long-standing issue over compensation for Pulau Ubin villagers has flared up again, with some islanders upset that they could be turfed out and not get anything in return.

However, the authorities have told The Sunday Times that these villagers have been living on state land in two separate exercises. The 83 landowners were compensated. Most moved out of Pulau Ubin, except for 22 households whose land was needed for development.

TOLs were then issued to these 22 households as well as the other group of villagers who have been on state land from the outset. They all now pay rent to the Government.

After NParks took over the management of the island in June 2016, it re-issued a new TOL to the residents under its banner with the terms unchanged.

Villagers fret about having to sign this agreement now, although NParks said that all had already done so two years ago. This was disputed by five villagers.

Said Mr Ong Kim Cheng, 60, a taxi driver: "My parents spent their entire savings to build this house and now I am told that I would not get a single cent should the Government decide to redevelop this place."

Born on Pulau Ubin, he continues to live alone in the house built by his late parents on the island. "I refused to sign. If I sign I am dead. I don't know what will happen. I don't have any savings," said Mr Ong.

Bicycle shopowner Sit Chin Chwee, 66, signed and demanded for the TOL to be returned the next day.

Mr Sit said that NParks officers did not explain all the terms in the five-page TOL to him.

"The officer only told me that I would need to apply for a licence to keep dogs here. I can't read English. I stopped schooling at Primary 4. I didn't know what the other terms were about until I heard people talking about it the next day," said Mr Sit.

NParks director of Pulau Ubin Robert Teo said he has since instructed his officers to stop approaching islanders to sign on the TOL, which was simply to acknowledge the additional clause.

On the villagers' gripe that they should be compensated for their homes should the land be returned to the State, Mr Teo said that the "no compensation" clause means "if for some reason the TOL is terminated, there might be loss of income or loss of investment because you took that TOL."

He added: "The condition says that there's no compensation for your loss. There's nothing to do with land ownership."

LOOKING INTO CLAIMS

We have recently received inquiries from additional households about whether they would be eligible to receive resettlement benefits. These claims are currently being looked into, and the relevant agencies will follow up directly with the respective individuals.

MND SPOKESMAN

FRETTING OVER FUTURE

My parents spent their entire savings to build this house and now I am told that I would not get a single cent should the Government decide to redevelop this place... I refused to sign. If I sign I am dead. I don't know what will happen. I don't have any savings.

MR ONG KIM CHENG, who lives on Pulau Ubin, is concerned about what the Temporary Occupation Licence agreement entails.



Mr Ong Kim Cheng reading the NParks' Temporary Occupation Licence agreement outside his house. The taxi driver who was born on Pulau Ubin continues to live alone in the house built by his late parents. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

Rolls-Royce to replace Scoot's older B-787 engines with new version

British engine-maker Rolls-Royce has agreed to rip out all the older Trent 1000 engines in Scoot's Boeing 787s and replace them with a newer, more reliable version.

This will affect 15 of the budget carrier's 18 B-787s that are fitted with the Trent 1000 "package C" engines which are corroding and cracking at a quicker rate than expected – causing significant operational hiccups.

Three of Scoot's newer B-787s are already powered by the latest version of the Trent 1000 – the

Trent 1000 TEN (Thrust, Efficiency and New technology) which came into operation in November 2017.

Mr Lee Lik Hsin, chief executive officer of Scoot – Singapore Airlines' budget arm – told The Sunday Times: "The intention is to change out the current version of the engine with the new version. The process has not started; we will do so when the engines are due for their first major overhaul."

"This is part of the manufacturer's commitment to us; that they will change out all (the engines) of



Rolls-Royce's replacement commitment will affect 15 of Scoot's 18 B-787s that are fitted with the Trent 1000 "package C" engines. PHOTO: SCOOT

our current version which have blade issues to the new version."

At list price, it could cost Rolls-Royce more than US\$600 million (\$S\$811 million) to replace the engines for all 15 aircraft. The firm did not reply to queries from The Sunday Times.

A fixed schedule for the replacement has not been finalised but works are expected to start progressively in the next two years and will take about four years to complete, Scoot said.

Until then, the airline will continue with stepped-up checks on the engine blades, Mr Lee said.

"The blade checks are not just for one type of blade. There are multiple areas; three blade areas which are undergoing the checks and these are not one-time checks but repetitive."

Mr Lee said: "At this juncture, all of our engines have already undergone some form of checks. The process is ongoing, continuous."

Until the older engines are replaced with the TEN version, the checks will continue, he said.

In April last year, Rolls-Royce reported it had delivered 380 "package C" engines, powering some 25 per cent of all B-787s in service.

Karamjit Kaur

Sorry, we messed up

Strong headwinds have hit Scoot, Singapore Airlines' budget arm, after a string of flight disruptions. In his first interview on the subject, Scoot chief Lee Lik Hsin tells Senior Aviation Correspondent Karamjit Kaur he is determined to win back consumer confidence.

Scoot messed up. Mr Lee Lik Hsin admits it, knows his customers are upset and is determined to regain their trust and confidence.

He stressed this repeatedly during a two-hour interview with The Sunday Times in his office at Changi Airport on Thursday.

"We want to apologise for the disruptions to people's travel plans and the service lapses that they encountered during the delays."

"We fully acknowledge and accept that customer confidence has been impacted because of the recent frequency and intensity of delays, unacceptable by any objective measure. We are, therefore, working on many fronts to improve in order to recover that confidence."

It was the first time that Mr Lee, 48, was speaking publicly about the disruptions which led to delays – ranging from short ones to up to 56 hours – and affected close to 5,000 Scoot passengers.

Long waits aside, many of those affected were upset that it took so long for the airline to activate the necessary contingency plans, including mounting relief flights.

They also felt that Scoot could have done a much better job taking care of their needs while they were stranded. Many also noted a lack of communication and timely updates, which made affected passengers even more agitated.

All areas are under review and plans are being rolled out progressively to address the shortcomings, Mr Lee said.

He emphasised, though, that at no time was passenger or crew safety compromised.

AIRCRAFT CHECKS AND INSPECTIONS

All the major delays since end-November have been on flights operated with the Boeing 787, Mr Lee confirmed.

Some were engine-related and others due to issues with components on the plane such as a windshield crack which forced a Scoot flight bound for Gold Coast on Jan 30 to return to Singapore three hours into its journey.

A few days before that, a problem with a door sensor delayed a Melbourne-Singapore flight.

The engine issues which have persisted for many months have affected all B-787 operators that have planes powered by Rolls-Royce's Trent 1000.

The turbine blades inside the Trent 1000 "package C" engines are corroding and cracking at a quicker rate than expected.

The best fix is to replace the engines with Rolls-Royce's new TEN version of the Trent 1000. This will be done but the entire process will take several years, Mr Lee said.

In the meantime, stepped-up checks on the existing engines will continue, he said.

There are also plans to tackle the other non-engine-related concerns such as the windshield that cracked and the door issue.

These issues that have cropped up are not just being brushed off as "ad hoc" incidents, Mr Lee said.

Plans are being devised and actions could include new inspection

programmes or more stringent checks for existing processes, he said, adding: "There are many discussions taking place right now."

RECOVERY PLANS

Even as aircraft checks and maintenance processes are intensified, a lot of work is being done to ensure operational resilience, Mr Lee said.

"When engineering issues occur and we are not able to fix them, we sometimes have to deploy another aircraft....The speed at which we are able to do this depends on overall aircraft utilisation (the number of hours a plane is in the air)."

He added: "Because of the recent issues that we have been facing, we have now made a deliberate decision to reduce our aircraft utilisation on the B-787 fleet over the next few months in order to provide for greater resilience such that when delays do happen, we are able to recover much faster than before."

"It's about how fast I can get the relief aircraft up to bring you back or how fast I can deploy a new aircraft from Singapore to continue the flight."

Scoot, which used to fly its B-787s an average of more than 14 hours a day, has reduced this to 13 hours plus. Singapore Airlines – which now operates, on a charter basis, several of Scoot's Singapore-Australia flights – has also agreed to take on more Scoot flights to other destinations, Mr Lee said, adding that details are being worked out.

SERVICE AND COMMUNICATION LAPSES

"We've heard the feedback loudly and clearly... and we humbly acknowledge that we have had several failings," Mr Lee said.

By the end of next month, Scoot will launch a new mobile-friendly online portal for those affected by delayed flights.

"We hope that there would not be too many," Mr Lee said, but, in the event of a delay, those affected can type in their booking reservation number and name to access real-time information.

This includes information on how long the delay is expected to last and whether the flight has been re-timed.

If arrangements are made for hotel accommodation, passengers will also be told what time the buses will leave and from where.

Social media manning hours will also be extended so that queries can be attended to faster.

On the ground, Scoot is working with its overseas partners to improve the process and timeliness of disseminating information when delays affect travellers outside Singapore.

Mr Lee said: "We cannot promise that delays won't happen, no airline can promise this. But everything that we've done up to this point is really about reducing the frequency of it happening as well as being able to handle it better when it happens; whether it is in terms of speed of recovery or the overall customer experience in that recovery."

Scoot knows that a failure to do better could eventually impact the bottom line. Being a budget airline



FAILINGS ACKNOWLEDGED

We've heard the feedback loudly and clearly... and we humbly acknowledge that we have had several failings.

SCOOT CEO LEE LIK HSIN, on the budget airline's service and communication lapses.

is no excuse, Mr Lee said: "On-time performance (OTP) is a core attribute and when you fail in that measure, you cannot claim to be a successful budget airline."

The model has also evolved in other ways, he said, citing the provision of accommodation in the event of delays as an example.

Where once budget carriers would just tell customers to make their own arrangements, "over time, we have found that to be untenable in terms of customer expectation".

Mr Lee said: "We certainly be-

lieve that a drop in consumer confidence affects customer purchasing decisions; it's only natural.

"We are in a very very competitive industry and passengers have choices. So we know we need to win back customers' trust in order for them to book on us again."

karam@sph.com.sg

SCAN TO WATCH
Scoot working to fix flight delays
<http://str.sg/leelikhsin>



DELAYS AND MORE

Since Nov 25 last year, thousands of Scoot passengers have been affected by at least 12 major flight disruptions caused by aircraft technical issues. The more serious ones include:

NOV 25, 2018

A flight to Bangkok was delayed at Changi Airport for nearly seven hours. Travellers were eventually transferred to a replacement aircraft but the return Bangkok-Singapore flight was also delayed, for around six hours.

NOV 26

A flight bound for Singapore was delayed by almost 30 hours in Tokyo and Bangkok. The plane had departed Tokyo with a planned stopover in Bangkok but pilots did a U-turn after a technical issue came up.

DEC 18

A flight from Athens with 321 passengers on board was delayed at least three times and eventually arrived in Singapore about 56 hours behind time. Passengers were made to board and disembark on three separate occasions over two days.

DEC 30

More than 350 passengers were stuck in Taipei on New Year's Eve after an electrical component defect grounded the plane. Replacement parts were flown there from Singapore.

The flight was rescheduled to take off the next morning but the technical issue persisted, and it departed only later that night. The flight landed in Singapore on New Year's Day after a delay of almost 30 hours.

JAN 1, 2019

A flight from Guangzhou to Singapore was delayed by more than 13 hours.

JAN 27

Almost 300 passengers flying from Melbourne to Singapore were left stranded for at least five hours after their flight was cancelled.

JAN 30

A plane with 341 passengers bound for Australia's Gold Coast was forced to return to Singapore three hours into the flight after the plane's front windshield was damaged.

A SPECIAL FEATURE BY SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY

SMU INTRODUCES A NEW CORE CURRICULUM TO CULTIVATE FUTURE-READY GRADUATES

The scale and complexity of the challenges facing the world today is unprecedented.

The explosion of new technologies, the disruption economy and the increasing integration of different disciplines and discoveries is creating change at a bewildering pace. This revolution is profoundly changing the way we live, work and relate to one another. In this world, simple one-dimensional solutions just don't cut it anymore.

Now imagine a core holistic undergraduate experience that nurtures students with the depth, breadth and flexibility to answer precisely the challenges of this revolutionary time. At SMU, that experience has arrived with the new Core Curriculum, a common interdisciplinary and intellectual experience that every SMU student must go through.



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SMU's distinctive pedagogies

A cornerstone of the Core Curriculum is collaborative, interactive learning exemplified by active learning, faculty-student interaction and the exchange of ideas. Another hallmark is experiential learning characterised by project-based learning, tackling of real problems and mentoring by faculty members and industry partners.

Together, these pedagogies develop graduates into creative critical thinkers who excel at complex problem solving and people management. There are the attributes ranked most vital in the workplace, according to a survey by the World Economic Forum.

Getting students to think about big questions

The Big Questions module was introduced to encourage students to think across disciplines and to think big, outside of traditional boxes. In this module, students ask big questions about life issues like poverty, suffering, inequality, and globalisation. Through this, they deepen their understanding and knowledge of the world, and cultivate emotional intelligence and decision-making skills which are critical soft and hard skills needed for the 21st century workspace.

Out-of-the-box thinking through multidisciplinary curriculum

Through multidisciplinary learning, students are encouraged to think from diverse perspectives and to develop their cognitive flexibility, particularly in the areas of emotional intelligence, judgement and decision making, as part of building their readiness to handle multifaceted careers. For instance, SMU's new Bachelor of Science (Computing & Law) degree cultivates students to be IT-savvy legal professionals who are adept at bridging technology with the law.



A NEW GENERATION OF GRADUATES: IMAGINATIVE, OPEN, CULTURALLY SENSITIVE AND FLEXIBLE

SMU's bold new Core Curriculum will cultivate individuals with the tools necessary to thrive in any environment, along with the openness of mind and clarity of vision to thrive in the 21st century. The SMU graduate will be technically competent, culturally aware, and socially conscious.

The Core Curriculum is crucial because it empowers students to master the changing dynamics of the future workplace.

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Professor Elvin Lim
Dean, Office of Core Curriculum

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Prospects improve for private-school graduates 5 years on

Despite initial bias, SIM's Class of 2013 finds employment rates and salaries do increase

Sandra Davie
Senior Education Correspondent

In recent years, graduate employment surveys of students who take the private-school route have shown that upon graduation, they earn far less than their peers from autonomous universities and seem to find it harder to find full-time jobs. This has raised the question of whether private-school students have been wasting their time and money.

However, a study launched last year by the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) to track the job prospects of their alumni, five years after they graduate, paints a different picture.

Almost all of them find jobs. They also appear to earn decent salaries.

But, to get there, they have to overcome an inherent bias against private-school students, observers say, a bias that shows itself almost from the time they enter the job market.

The last graduate employment survey released by the Committee for Private Education and SkillsFuture Singapore in November 2017 showed that only six in 10 private-school graduates found full-time jobs within six months of completing their studies, drawing an average starting monthly pay of \$2,550.

This was lower than statistics from the autonomous universities (AUs), where 80 per cent of graduates found full-time jobs within six months of getting their degrees, with an average monthly starting pay of \$3,325.

Most recruitment experts attribute the differences to employers discriminating against private-school graduates. But what happens five years down the career path?

To answer this question, SIM, Sin-

gapore's leading private school, studied last year what had become of its class of 2013.

SIM is seen as the go-to school by Singaporeans who fail to get into local universities or their choice of degree programme. Out of 18,000 enrolled in its degree programmes, 14,800 are Singaporeans. The majority – 12,800 – are studying full time.

The results show that SIM alumni's job prospects and pay improve considerably over five years.

Of the 1,133 SIM graduates who responded to the survey, the overall employment rate was 97.4 per cent, and 94 per cent held full-time jobs.

The vast majority are working for private firms, with about one in 10 working for the public sector.

Their gross monthly salary works out to \$4,551. Other findings from the SIM survey include:

- One in four holds a manager or senior manager position, and 61 per cent reported that they are senior executives or executives.
- Three in five have been promoted at least once.
- Of those surveyed, 66 per cent said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their career so far.
- One in 10 reported that they were self-employed, and among them, 40 per cent said they were employers.
- Majority are in private firms, both local and foreign, with more than half working in companies with more than 500 employees.

Mr Lee Kwok Cheong, chief executive of SIM Holdings, which runs degree programmes with 12 university partners, attributes the initial lag in job rates and salaries to employers' bias against those who take the private-school route.

"Most employers still hire based on qualifications. They equate gen-



Mr Andrew Yeo was valedictorian at the Singapore Institute of Management. He then earned a master's degree in social policy and planning from the London School of Economics and Political Science, but still did not get a response for many of the government jobs he applied for. He eventually got a job as a research assistant at the Institute of Policy Studies. He then moved to a consultancy firm and subsequently, the Singapore Exchange Regulation. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

JOB PERFORMANCE COUNTS

However, once on the job, the university name may not matter so much any more. What matters is whether the person is productive and can value-add to the company. So, I would expect earnings and promotion prospects between private and (autonomous university) grads to narrow with working experience.



NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE ECONOMIST KELVIN SEAH



SCAN TO WATCH
Taking the private school route.
<http://str.sg/andrewyeo>



ties people attend and the salaries they earn, at various points in time.

However, Dr Seah said the high full-time employment rate of 94 per cent and the relatively high gross salary of \$4,551 of SIM alumni are commendable, given that the median gross monthly income from work (excluding employer Central Provident Fund contributions) of the population of full-time workers in Singapore was \$3,800 last year.

Recruitment experts, including Mr David Leong, managing director of PeopleWorldwide Consulting, hold the same view.

Several SIM alumni interviewed admitted that they faced discrimination during their job search.

Several of them, despite having good grades and even postgraduate qualifications from prestigious universities overseas after SIM, said they were not even given a chance to attend interviews for government jobs.

However, they were driven to prove themselves against their peers from the AUs and worked hard at doing well in their careers.

Mr Andrew Yeo, 31, senior associate at the strategic planning office of Singapore Exchange Regulation, the regulatory entity of SGX, said that despite going to the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and graduating with a master's in social policy and planning, he could not land a job with any government body.

In the end, he decided to try for a job in academia and found work as a

research assistant with the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS). After two years, he moved to work in a consultancy firm and subsequently, SGX.

He said he went to SIM as his polytechnic results were not good enough to get him into university.

But despite completing his University at Buffalo degree at SIM with top marks and being named valedictorian, he realised he was not going to land a job in the government sector.

"That was one of the reasons why I went to LSE, to get a degree that would put me in better stead. Private-school students tend to over-compensate. I have classmates who went to universities such as Oxford and Cambridge."

He was disappointed when he did not receive a response for many of the government jobs he applied for after LSE.

"I had a lucky break, in that the persons who interviewed me for the IPS job took the time to interview me and, in the end, were convinced that despite my non-conventional route, I had the right skills for the job."

Mr Lee said SIM has to accept the fact that there is a bias against its graduates.

"That's why we are focused on our mission – to provide a good education and training pathways which will open doors in life for our students. So, despite the different starting point, we focus on helping them perform well at work, so that they will be able to move up."

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Teen's online gripe about travelling sparks generational debate

Janice Tai
Social Affairs Correspondent

An innocuous Facebook post by a 19-year-old girl on her travel experiences has fuelled discussion online and sparked a debate on whether her sentiments reflect those of her generation.

Student Audrey Chong shared with online content provider Youth.SG how a holiday with her friends did not turn out to be "all rainbows and sparkles" as she had expected.

Instead, she said, she faced all sorts of problems, from convincing worried parents, gathering enough money and finding friends who would not bail out before the trip, to Google Maps "messing up" and arguments among travelling mates over sharing one portable Wi-Fi router.

The most challenging thing for her, she said, was waking up early and being on time as the bus in Japan was always punctual, and being a minute late would derail plans for the day.

And so, her conclusion was that "if someone asks about going on a grad trip, I would advise them against it". "Because no staycation in Singapore will ever prepare you for a trip in a foreign country."

Her post last week elicited about 4,000 responses from netizens, with many of them leaving negative or critical comments, which mocked her and the strawberry generation that she may represent.

Some comments were particularly brutal and personal in nature, saying, for example, that she "will never amount to anything with that attitude" and that her parents

"need a refund for their child".

Some included sarcastic memes about their own travails over trivial issues.

Even Youth.SG, which is a youth portal supported by the National Youth Council, was not spared the online flaming, with its decision to publish her post questioned.

Several businesses in the travel industry jumped on the bandwagon, taking a tongue-in-cheek jibe at Ms Chong and promoting their local staycation options.

Crowne Plaza Hotel Changi Airport said: "If travelling with friends sounds like too much of a challenge, you can always plan a staycation with us, it's the closest thing to leaving the country – complete with a trip to Changi Airport!"

Travel website Skyscanner acknowledged that travel planning can be a daunting affair but encouraged her not to let her experience put her off travelling, while Singapore-based travel community The Travel Intern deftly left her a link to their Japan travel itinerary.

"Many of us at 19 (years old) wouldn't be seasoned travellers and it's normal to be frustrated when things don't go the way you hoped it would," said Mr Travis Chan, editor at The Travel Intern, in response to queries from The Sunday Times.

Others were less understanding and compared her situation with their own experiences at the same age.

"At 19, besides studying, most of us were worrying about money for school and coursework," said Mr Peter Pang, 34, a video editor.

"Audrey's problems are a product of the current generation's education and parenting. There's



Student Audrey Chong, 19, found travelling with friends, and the logistics around planning her trip, not as straightforward as she thought. PHOTO: YOUTH.SG

too much babysitting and no room for children to fail or fall," he added. "I wonder how they are going to cope with being an adult in their 20s and 30s when they could fall the hardest."

But many also defended Ms Chong.

"People mature at different ages due to their life experiences and whether their environment calls for it. I don't think it's a cause for concern," said Mr Shaun Tan, 26, who works in the creative industry.

He shared Ms Chong's post and said: "Her only faults are her inexperience and 100 per cent honesty during the interview."

Veteran social worker Michael Ong agreed that she was only being honest.

"She is rather typical of many youths around the world, except that she has the courage to voice it and it is amplified on social media,"

CRAVING ATTENTION

What this generation lacks and craves is attention, and that must come from parents and educators spending time to guide them, instead of them turning to social media to receive superficial validation or harsh criticism.



MR DELANE LIM, executive director of CLA

said Mr Ong, 49, who has counselled young people in other countries, including Vietnam and the United States, over the last 24 years.

"She is not the problem but the product of the failures of my generation, such as being overprotected," he added.

Ms Chong did not reply to queries from The Sunday Times.

Following the online furore over her post, youth development charity Character and Leadership Academy (CLA) polled 50 students aged 16 to 20 from one secondary school and two tertiary institutions for their views on the matter.

An overwhelming majority said Ms Chong's attitudes and views were reflective of their generation.

They used words like "entitled", "emotional", "enjoy travelling" and "don't care about being late" to describe their generation, otherwise known as the post-millennial generation, or Generation Z.

CLA also polled 21 parents of teenagers to ask if they felt that Ms Chong was representative of their children. The result was the reverse, with 70 per cent disagreeing with the notion.

"Unlike the parents, the survey results show that young people are more self-aware of the traits of their current generation and that is a good thing," said Mr Delane Lim, executive director of CLA.

"What this generation lacks and craves is attention, and that must come from parents and educators spending time to guide them, instead of them turning to social media to receive superficial validation or harsh criticism," he added.

Student Emma Goh, 19, felt that there was no need for people to "react vehemently" to Ms Chong's post

as "she, like many of us, is still 'in the works'".

Mr Clifford Foo, 19, however, felt there was value in having such discussions. "It is important not to disregard such personal attacks, however insulting they are."

"Some of the comments are true to a certain degree, and these values that our generation exhibits are worrying and we need to avoid them or Singapore will go down a road of no return," he added.

The National Youth Council said it encourages respect and acceptance of diverse views and opinions from youth as every individual has his own journey of learning and discovery.

"Audrey shared her honest experience, hoping that other youth dreaming of their first trip would be realistic of the challenges that come with planning it," said the council spokesman.

Mr Vivek Iyyani, a speaker and author of a book called Empowering Millennials, said Ms Chong's post may have struck a nerve with some individuals because people cannot relate to her challenges or empathise with her.

"The points she shared may seem trivial and personal, but certain points that she raised are indicative of the 'challenges' this generation faces today," said Mr Vivek.

"This generation is known to have helicopter parents who are overprotective in bringing up their children and also for being over-reliant on technology," he added.

Beyond such generational observations or stereotypes, Ms Rachel Loh, 19, said the responses to the post also reveal a darker side of Singaporeans.

She said: "My generation may be over-reliant, incompetent and entitled, but the number of attacks on her just shows that Singaporeans are overly critical."

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Sumita Thiagarajan

DAUGHTER, NEIGHBOUR, ENVIRONMENT ADVOCATE

RECIPES FOR KINSHIP

"It all started when I noticed how much food was wasted every day. I knew I had to do something about it. We don't realise it, but when we throw away food, we are also wasting precious natural resources – such as the water and energy invested into growing the produce.

It seems silly and a waste of money to throw away food that's still perfectly edible, just because they are slightly bruised or discoloured. That's why I visit fruit and vegetable suppliers to collect 'ugly' and blemished produce that would otherwise be disposed of, and use them to improvise new recipes. These recipes are shared with my family and friends, along with tips for cooking with leftovers or 'ugly' fruits and vegetables. We even share any excess groceries with our neighbours. Doing so has allowed my family and me to grow closer, and it fosters stronger ties amongst my community too.

On top of that, I regularly volunteer at events and conduct public talks and workshops to encourage greener lifestyles. My wish is to see more people adopt a greener lifestyle – if each of us can influence one person, that would be a great start."



Build stronger bonds



Waste less food



Sofia Khanafie

FULL-TIME STUDENT, PART-TIME FASHIONISTA

FASHIONABLE HABITS

"I discovered it by chance. Now, I'm always looking forward to the next clothes swap. The concept is simple: you exchange your old clothes for pre-loved ones. It's a great way to make new friends while giving old clothes a new lease of life. In 2017, we generated about 150,000 tonnes of textile and leather waste – of which only 6% was recycled.

In the past, I was often buying more than I needed. Before I knew it, I had a ton of items that ended up being simply chucked aside in a corner. Since I started clothes swapping, that hasn't been an issue anymore.

It's a fun way to refresh my wardrobe without expanding it or throwing clothes away. I've also become more creative with my styling because I have to work with what I find. Sometimes, it even feels like a treasure hunt! Moreover, it has also connected me to like-minded individuals and communities wanting to make a positive impact on the environment. It's funny how a small decision like this can change the way we see the world. Now, I can satisfy my urge to shop in a way that's friendly on my wallet and the environment too! It's a great sense of freedom."



Make new friends



Reduce textile waste



HERE ARE SOME EASY TIPS FOR YOU TO GET STARTED!

Odd-looking, bruised and blemished fruits and vegetables can be just as nutritious as perfect-looking ones.



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At the signing ceremony for the MOUs were (from left) Changi General Hospital's chief financial officer Lim Lee Nor and CEO Lee Chien Earn; SUESS president Cheong Hee Kiat; SingHealth Community Hospitals' CEO Margaret Lee and finance director Marianne Au; as well as SUESS provost Tsui Kai Chong. PHOTO: SUESS

SUESS students to help promote active ageing

Jolene Ang

The Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUESS) has made a commitment to help its students better understand and support the needs of the elderly and their caregivers.

Yesterday, it signed two memorandums of understanding (MOU) with the People's Association (Ang Mo Kio Community Centre) and Sport Singapore (SportSG), and with Changi General Hospital (CGH) and SingHealth Community Hospitals, which aim to encourage active ageing and inter-generational bonding.

Under the first MOU, SUESS gerontology faculty and students will work together with the ActiveSG gym at Ang Mo Kio Community Centre to do research on sports, wellness and education. One possible research area is inter-generational communication, said SUESS.

SportSG chief executive Lim Teck Yin said: "This collaboration will see us coming together to enable and learn about active ageing and inter-generational mixing."

"We are looking to nurture social networks where family, friends and colleagues support and sustain

an enjoyable and active lifestyle."

SUESS' second agreement with the hospitals will see them "cooperate on healthcare innovation, research and education to help elderly patients" for a period of three years.

Under this partnership, SUESS and the hospitals aim to raise awareness of ageing issues, and advocate for a better environment for seniors, said the university.

CGH will also provide guidance and internship opportunities to SUESS PhD students, particularly those reading gerontology.

Dr Carol Ma, SUESS' head of gerontology, said the university's gerontology programmes aim to develop students with theoretical knowledge and practical experiences in eldercare.

SUESS president Cheong Hee Kiat, who signed the MOUs, said: "With Singapore facing an ageing population, more needs to be done to help the elderly and their caregivers, and encourage inter-generational relationship. These two MOUs are significant and meaningful steps towards this end... It is in line with our university's social focus and applied learning approach."

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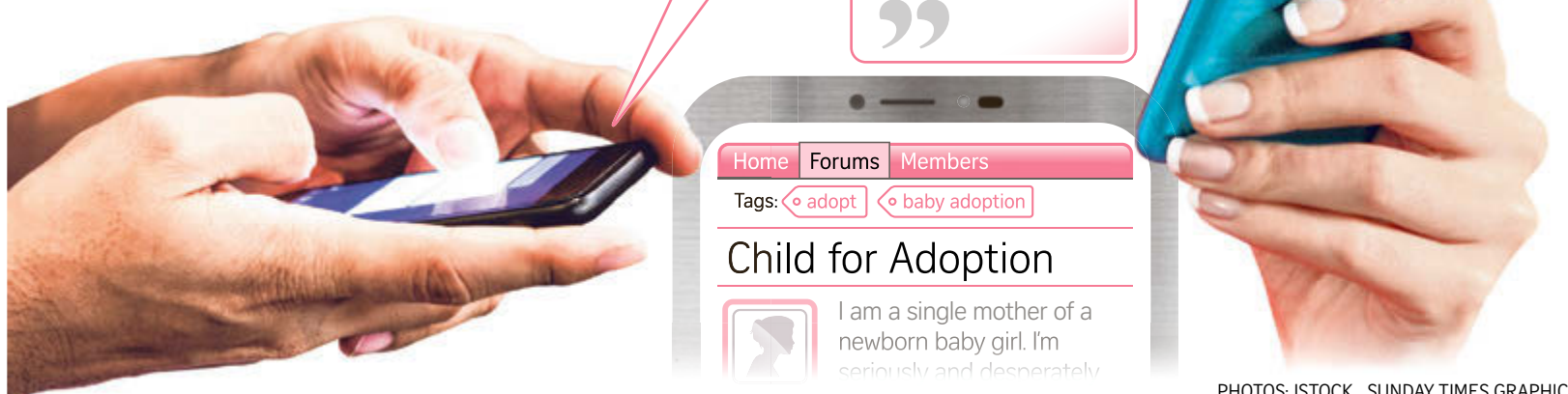
Hi, good day. I am considering giving up my unborn child. I am living alone and am not yet financially stable. I'm looking for a couple who can assist me financially until I give birth. I'm from the Philippines.

I am a single mother of a newborn baby girl. I'm seriously and desperately seeking an adoptive parent for my baby girl. It has been a hard decision, but I believe it is selfish if I don't give this child the opportunity she deserves. I really need someone to adopt her and treat her like her/his own blood.

I'm an unwed mum and had this pregnancy unexpectedly. My fiancé and I have broken off ties and I am financially incapable of raising a child. Not mentally prepared. Will be glad if there is any family who is willing to adopt my baby girl.

Regardless of race and gender, we are looking for someone who is truly in need to give their baby up for adoption. I have had two disappointments, where the biological family decided not to proceed once the baby was born. We are a couple who have been married for six years and have fertility issues and are considering adoption to give a child love and a family.

Hi, if anyone is putting your child up for adoption, please contact me. I'm interested. I'm 35 and married for six years. No child yet and IVF failed.



PHOTOS: ISTOCK SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

Adoption requests pop up on parenting websites

Parents desperate for a child, or to give one up, take search online; but experts advise caution

Theresa Tan
Senior Social Affairs
Correspondent

Desperate to give a baby up for adoption or anxious to adopt, some people are turning to online parenting forums to find what they are looking for.

The practice is not illegal, unless the birth parents profit financially, said lawyers The Sunday Times spoke to.

On parenting websites Singapore Motherhood and Mummy SG, there are dozens of such posts. One claimed to be a "local mixed-blood family looking to give up our one-month-old daughter for adoption due to financial burdens", adding: "Any serious couple can take her with a small adoption fee. We are not looking to make money off her."

"We love her a lot, just that we have a lot (of) financial stuff to settle and the pregnancy and hospital bills have brought us down a lot."

Prospective parents told The Sunday Times that besides going to adoption agents, they visit these sites to expand their search for a child.

Jessie (not her real name), 43, who is in marketing, said: "We were

desperate to have a child. I googled 'adoption', came across this online forum, and so I thought we should try our luck."

However, she said she found a baby through an adoption agent before making any headway online.

Others like administrative assistant Mel (not her real name), 35, went online as she could not afford to hire an adoption agent. Married for six years and still childless, she e-mailed a woman who had said on a forum that she wanted to give her baby daughter up for adoption.

The woman later said it was actually her friend who wanted to give up her twins and asked for US\$3,000 (S\$4,000) to bring the girls from the United Kingdom where they are living to Singapore.

Mel said she stopped contact and added: "It sounds like a scam."

It costs about \$25,000 to adopt a baby from Malaysia or Indonesia from an adoption agent. The fees include the medical and hospital bills of the mother and child, and fees for the adoption agent and lawyer. The bill to adopt a Singaporean baby can go up to \$45,000, agents said.

There were 432 adoption applications last year, showed preliminary figures from the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF). This is 15 per cent more than the 375 in 2017.

The trend of looking for a baby to adopt from online forums comes as

there are fewer Singaporean children placed for adoption than prospective parents, the MSF said in response to a parliamentary question on adoption last month.

None of the women from these forums responded to The Sunday Times. Fei Yue Family Service Centre (Choa Chu Kang) principal social worker Cheng Wenshan said it was possible some of them were hoping to profit from the move.

The Adoption of Children Act prohibits any payment or reward to the biological parents or to the adoptive parents, unless sanctioned by the court. The court will require the prospective adopters to provide details of financial transactions, which may include reimbursement for the pre- and post-natal expenses.

Lawyer Shone Aye Cheng of AC Shone & Co said: "If payment is involved, then it is like selling the child. Children are not possessions or commodities that could be sold or purchased."

Ms Shone has two clients who were conned by the same pregnant woman they met through an online forum. The housewife in her 20s said she had huge debts, could not afford another child and wanted to give up her unborn child.

One of Ms Shone's clients gave the pregnant woman \$15,000, and the other gave \$10,000. But the woman did not let them adopt her baby girl after she gave birth. They threatened to lodge a police report and she agreed to pay them back.

When asked how it ensures there are no illegal adoption-related activity on its site, a spokesman for Singapore Motherhood said it receives up to 6,000 postings a month and its moderators are unable to keep track of every conversation thread.

Besides, the parties involved can contact one another offline or privately, so it is unable to know if any financial transaction has taken place. It has also posted stories saying that paying parents to give their child up for adoption is illegal. The spokesman added: "We would advise our community members (and anyone, in fact) to research and exercise caution when deciding to adopt from an unknown party."

The MSF stressed that it is risky to use online forums and advised parents to turn to its accredited adoption agencies. They are Apkim Centre for Social Services, Fei Yue Community Services, Lutheran Community Care Services and Touch Family Services.

Touch Family Services senior manager Teo Seok Bee said it is common for mothers-to-be to change their minds about placing their child for adoption for various reasons. Hence, it is vital for trained professionals to counsel both the birth and adoptive parents, and to prepare and support them for what the adoption entails.

Ms Teo added: "If not properly advised, birth and adoptive families can start the adoption process without the relevant consent or documentation and end up having to terminate the process."

theresat@sph.com.sg

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(Marcus Tay was featured in book "Asia's TOP Investments & Franchise To Make Your First Million")

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9 Mar (Sat) 1.30 to 3.30 PM (IRR Room)
13 Mar (Wed) 7.30 to 9.30 PM (IRR Room)

* Past performance is not necessarily indicative of future performance, even if the same strategies are adopted. And All forms of investments carry risks, including the risk of losing all of the invested amount. Such activities may not be suitable for everyone.

LEAN WORKSHOP: CONTINUOUS FLOW

14 March 2019 (Thursday), 9.00am to 5.00pm
Workshop Fees: \$107 for SME / \$321 for non-SME per participant (after subsidy)
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Many companies and organisations short-change themselves when they fail to optimise the benefits and outputs from their existing resources. By applying Continuous Flow, you could deliver maximum and uninterrupted value to your customers.

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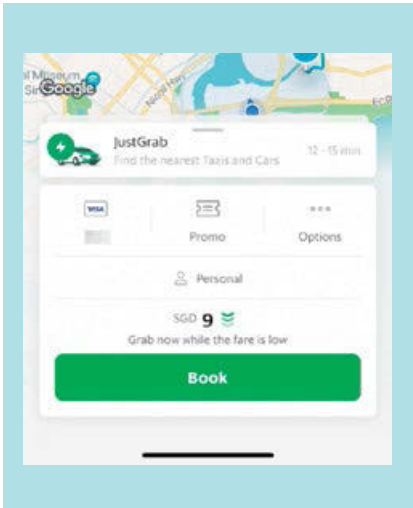
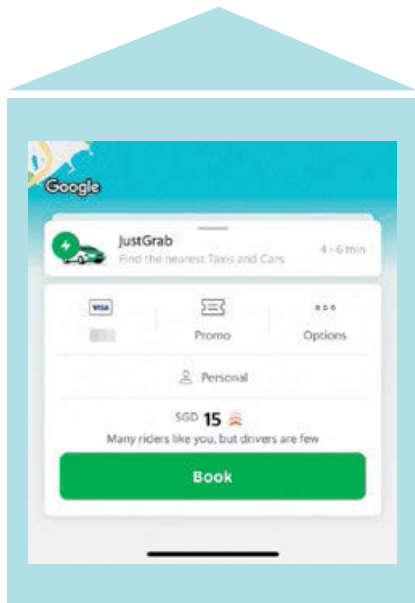
Why hailing a ride sometimes makes you #emo

CHAN SIEW LIAN

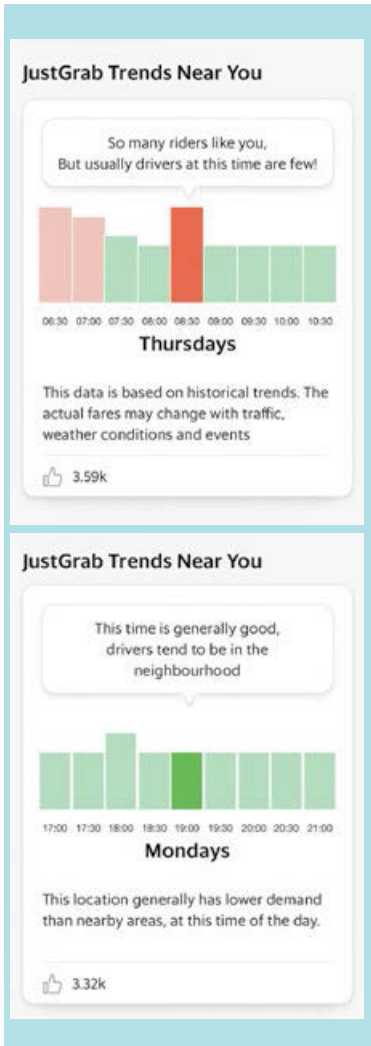
I remember the day ride-hailing failed me. It was a Monday, the first day at my current job. I had been frantically toggling between Grab and Ryde for a car (Uber had just ditched South-east Asia, RIP Uber), but there was none. After 40 minutes of stress and rejection, I gave up, after a friend offered me a lift. While they can be cheaper than taxis, ride-hailing platforms do not promise you the cheapest ride. Instead, their unique selling proposition is an available car. But what happened that morning – hours after the 2018 World Cup final between France and Croatia – I learnt that even the smartest algorithms can't force drivers to wake up for work after an adrenaline-filled game.

Dynamic pricing, or surge pricing, uses a complex algorithm to balance supply and demand. When demand exceeds supply, such as during rush hours, fares surge so that those who need a ride urgently – and who are willing to pay the premium – can get a car. While hotels and airlines have been using dynamic pricing for years, the pill seems harder to swallow in ride-hailing. Maybe it is because we have been spoilt by promo codes since the early days of Uber and Grab. Or that most rides in Singapore are relatively short – there is a psychological barrier to paying \$50 to get to the other side of town. Or maybe because the reasons for a jump in the fare, especially for our regular commute, are not exactly clear. Even the rich are not immune to feeling shortchanged. In 2013, during a particularly dark and snow-stormy night, American comedian Jerry Seinfeld's wife Jessica paid Uber

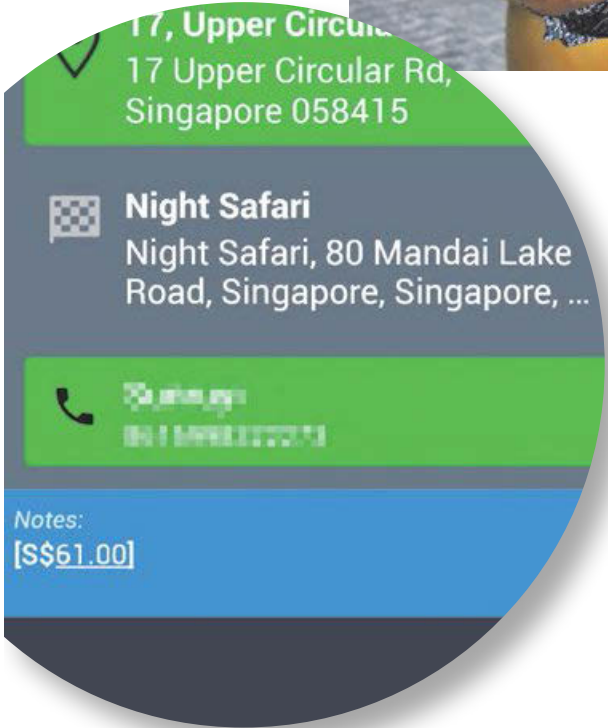
US\$415 (\$563) to chauffeur her children to a bar mitzvah and a sleepover. She ended her Instagram post with #OMG #neverforget #neveragain #real. Psychologist and senior consultant Praveen Nair of Raven Counselling and Consultancy attributes the feeling of indignation to a perceived sense of injustice. "Such feelings of injustice and anger may eventually lead to displaced aggression – when a person can't vent on an original source, so he or she takes it out on an available outlet. This may lead to a host of conflicts." It does not help that many Singaporeans believe the cost of living here is high. "As such, people may be predisposed to feeling more sensitive to price changes within dynamic pricing," says Mr Nair. "Such price changes may trigger negative emotions leading to behaviour that may be less pro-social."



Grab's in-app copy now explains why fares are surging (left). Riders with flexible schedules can estimate when hailing a ride could be cheaper (below).



Private-hire driver Mr Zainol Shaik Fareed (right) keeps a screenshot of his most expensive trip (below). PHOTO: CHAN BEE LENG



Drivers: Time is money

There is an inherent friction between what drivers and riders want. For drivers, time is money. They want the most bucks for the number of hours they spend on the road. Their earnings help defray the costs of fuel, car rental, insurance and other expenses, which could be around 60 per cent of their driving income. Most ride-hailing platforms in Singapore take a 20 per cent commission from fares. A platform that provides a consistent stream of bookings, at fares that allow them to make a living, is essential. Gracie Lin, Head of Economics at Grab, says: "Drivers drive more when prices are higher. Surge helps to bring more drivers onto the road, especially during the busiest times, when they are most needed. Surge makes up 17 to 25 per cent of drivers' post-commission earnings on average, which is substantial." Some drivers devise strategies that allow them to maximise earnings. A 38-year-old private-hire driver who wanted to be known only as Mr Teoh, said driving is like a game. He constantly optimises his strategy, taking into account the latest incentive structure, tips he receives via his Whatsapp driver chat groups, and his own instincts. He tries to be at high-demand places at the right time. Late last year, he upgraded to a premium six-seater so that he could get in high-

er-ticket bookings. He now pockets \$2,000 per week in fares alone, before adding on any peak-hour perks. Similar incentives kept driver Tan Kian Lye, 52, on the road during the first day of Chinese New Year. He ferried a passenger from Woodlands checkpoint to Pasir Ris for \$41. The passenger, who had missed his bus into Johor Baru, told Mr Tan: "I normally wouldn't take a ride at this price, but no choice, I forgot my passport." **Motivation** There are also drivers who keep screenshots of their highest fares – precious reminders that luck favours the conscientious driver. Mr Zainol Shaik Fareed, 50, showed me a screenshot he has kept from 2016: a memorable journey from Upper Circular Road to the Night Safari at 5.30pm on a weekday, which netted him \$61. The tourists from China had no qualms about paying the fare. But not all private-hire drivers have experienced high surge fares. The most expensive ride Ms Loh Soon Sum, 56, encountered in almost four years with Grab was \$33, from High Street to Choa Chu Kang during the evening rush hour. But the ex-cabbie also finds joy in the little things. Passengers often exclaim, "Wow, you're my first female driver!", which always puts a smile on her face.

Riders: Safe, fast, cheap

Riders, on the other hand, want to reach their destinations safe, fast and at the lowest price – which is not always possible. Ms Hayati Haron, 37, found herself facing a train breakdown during the fasting month last year. She managed to hail a ride from Somerset to Yishun for \$35. "I was willing to pay that much only because I was with my niece, and we wanted to break fast with our family. I was too exhausted to think of the bus route to go home." For Nanyang Technological University student Tan Aik, 22, he couldn't get a ride to the West Coast area to be with his friend whose father had died. Desperate, he forked out \$50 for a premium car. "I was annoyed at having to pay that much but I was glad that I was on my way. I wanted to be there for my friend, who was going through a difficult time." Without a mechanism to prioritise allocation, the likelihood of getting a car in times of urgent need diminishes. However, riders can get riled up as they might feel arm-twisted. "Most people in Singapore are working long hours, within rigid schedules, in a fast-paced city. So the demand for transportation can be immediate and riders may not be able to circumvent price hikes," says Mr Nair. "Furthermore, riders may not want to arrive at their destination earlier or later just to save some money, and feel like they've wasted time. This sense of having their choices impinged upon during surge pricing may cause them to feel as though they are being unfairly disempowered." For those who do not need a car urgently, one way to mitigate fare surges is through better travel planning. Recent improvements to Grab's app are explanations of why fares are low or high, and a widget that shows half-hourly fare trends from a chosen pick-up point on any given day, based on data over the past two months. And there are always other options. Mr Ryan Lewis used to work at Changi Airport. On days when he didn't want to take the MRT to work, the 41-year-old would arrange for a GrabHitch the night before. If he couldn't secure a ride by the time he woke up for work, he would book a GrabShare ride. "A ride to the airport would cost me more than \$20, and could be double that with surge pricing during peak hours," he said. "But if I were to take a GrabHitch or GrabShare, I'd pay less than \$20."

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Lower entry costs for budding microbrewers

They can soon choose to pay pro-rated licence fee instead of entire \$8.4k annual fee up front

Ng Huiwen

From May 1, start-ups in the brewing industry will have something to

raise their glasses to.

New microbreweries will get the option to pay a pro-rated licence fee instead of the whole annual fee of \$8,400 up front.

The fee will be \$2,100 per quarter in the first year, and business owners will be able to get a refund if they give up their licence early.

Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry and Education Chee Hong Tat, who announced the new framework yesterday, said that this would allow budding microbrewers to test new business

models or products without incurring high entry costs.

Mr Chee said: "In other words, a start-up only needs to pay for the duration when they are in operation instead of forking out a lump sum for the annual licence, when it is not certain at the beginning how long they will remain in business."

He was speaking at student-led

start-up conference Unicon 2019, which was held at the National University of Singapore.

The Pro-Enterprise Panel (PEP), which encourages a pro-business environment here, worked with the Singapore Customs to implement the new framework for microbreweries after receiving suggestions.

In his speech, Mr Chee said he had spoken to the three Binjai Brew founders who made headlines in April last year for brewing beer in their Nanyang Technological University hostel.

He had asked the engineering students – Mr Rahul Immandira, Mr Abilash Subbaraman and Mr Heetesh Alwani – about their plans and how the PEP can support them.

The trio, who have since partnered a microbrewery to produce their beer, had asked Mr Chee if

more could be done to help entrepreneurs like themselves.

Until 2012, microbreweries had to pay the same annual fee as large-scale breweries – \$43,000.

But that year, the Singapore Customs introduced a microbrewery licence with an annual fee of \$8,400. It allows new or smaller businesses to work with existing breweries to produce beer and test their flavours in the market before deciding to expand commercially.

Mr Chee said: "This idea of lowering entry barriers to encourage entrepreneurship can also be applied to other regulatory licences. I encourage the business community and our government agencies to work together with PEP to explore these possibilities."

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S'pore's WWII markers will carry four official languages, Japanese

Yuen Sin

The design of World War II historic markers will be updated to include Singapore's four official languages, as well as Japanese, the National Heritage Board (NHB) said on Friday.

This comes after former foreign minister George Yeo, at an Institute of Policy Studies conference last month, highlighted how a Sook Ching monument at Changi Beach that previously bore these five languages has been replaced by a plaque that is only in English.

"This is deliberately reducing our cultural genome... It is denying us of a powerful capability, a precious inheritance from the past which in fact will secure our future," he had said, calling for linguistic diversity to be preserved at such public monuments and signs.

Including Japanese was crucial as it is also important for the Japanese to know this history, he added.

In a Facebook post on Friday, the NHB thanked Mr Yeo for his

feedback on the marker at Changi Beach, which was first erected in 1992 to mark the massacre of 66 Chinese male civilians at the beach by Japanese firing squads in February 1942.

"World War II is an important part of Singapore's history. Given its special significance, we agree with Mr Yeo that having these historic site markers in four official languages and Japanese will enable Singaporeans and visitors to better reflect on how our wartime history has shaped Singapore and its people," said the NHB.

The board added that it will explore ways, including using technology, to make more information on its historic sites available to visitors. It aims to strike a balance between presenting meaningful content to the reader and practical considerations such as readability.

Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu said in a Facebook post on Friday that she is glad that the NHB has reviewed Mr Yeo's feedback, and will be



The National Heritage Board's decision to update WWII markers comes after former foreign minister George Yeo highlighted at a conference last month that a plaque (above, left) about the Sook Ching massacre at Changi Beach has only English text, replacing a marker (left, below) that bore the four official languages and Japanese. PHOTOS: SAHIBA CHAUDHARY, LITTLE DAY OUT

updating its World War II historic site markers.

"This will enable more Singaporeans and overseas visitors to gain a better understanding of our wartime past, as well as the lessons to be learnt from this poignant chapter in our history," she wrote.

A check by The Sunday Times of 36 signs at memorials, national monuments, tourist attractions and public institutions earlier this month found that about 40 per cent did not have all four official languages.

However, some agencies have quietly made moves to reinstate this diversity on their public signboards.

Changi Airport now has all four official languages and Japanese on its signs at Terminal 2 and Terminal 4, which opened in 2017. But most signs at Terminals 1 and 3 still do not include Tamil.

In Chinatown, a brown sign put up by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) that marked the Chinatown Food Street in Smith Street now bears a Tamil translation, though photos from 2009 show that Tamil



was missing then.

Tamil has also been added to the brown signs at Lau Pa Sat Festival Market, and Merlion Park near the Esplanade Bridge, which did not

have Tamil in photos taken in 2012. The STB's brown signs indicate tourist attractions or landmarks.

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Cara Wong

It has been more than two years since the residents of Dakota Crescent moved to Cassia Crescent, but they know that help from the Cassia Resettlement Team (CRT) is just a call away.

Once, a male resident, in critical condition at a hospital, insisted that his doctors call the volunteer group, instead of his own family, to update them on his situation, as he felt closer to the group.

This is one of many anecdotes recounted in a new book, *They Told Us To Move: Dakota – Cassia*, which chronicles the lives of the residents after the move.

The book, written from the point of view of former residents, CRT volunteers and various academics, was launched yesterday and is available at Kinokuniya, Times bookstore and on Ethos Books' website.

Dr Ng Kok Hoe, an assistant professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, said: "(The book) uses Dakota as a case study to ask a question about what kind of society we want to be."

The story of Dakota Crescent is more than just an urban housing situation, he added, as the move had highlighted the everyday plight of its largely older and low-income residents.

Many of them lived in rental flats and had to move out of the old estate by end-2016. The area is being redeveloped for public housing.

"Inevitably, when we talk about the story of Dakota and relocation, we are also talking about how we treat our older people and low-income communities. These are often issues at the very heart of what



(From left) Editors Ng Kok Hoe, 39, Lim Jingzhou, 22, and Sammie Ng, 21, whose book chronicles the lives of Dakota Crescent residents after their move. Mr Lim, Ms Ng and fellow editor Rocky Howe, 24, are members of the Cassia Resettlement Team, a volunteer group that helps the residents. PHOTO: ETHOS BOOKS

it means to be a society," said Dr Ng, who is one of the book's editors.

For example, problems such as loneliness or growing old have cropped up during the volunteers' interactions with residents.

These issues were exacerbated by the move, which thrust them out of their comfort zones, said Mr Lim Jingzhou, 22, co-founder of CRT.

He and his team were approached to work on the book with Dr Ng in August 2017, after Dr Ng heard about their volunteer work, which began in early 2017.

The team of more than 50 volunteers still make weekly visits to help residents at Cassia Crescent.

They assist with connecting them to the appropriate social agencies, or even for matters such as taking them to the doctor.

Putting the book together gave the team time to reflect on their

work, said Mr Lim.

A fellow volunteer, Mr Rocky Howe, said the experience raised the question of who will continue to care for residents in the long run.

"At the end of the day, whose responsibility is it to address these gaps we fill? Clearly, we can't do it forever with these residents, so you know, we have to ask ourselves, where does the buck stop?" said Mr Howe, 24, one of the three CRT members who edited the book.

But for now, the team has no plans to stop working with the residents, said Mr Lim.

"It has been two years since the move – there's actually very little relocation help they need now, but many of their other needs are still unmet," he said. "So we're still doing it. Every week, we will be there."

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Worker killed in Changi tipper truck accident

Choo Yun Ting

A 27-year-old foreign worker has been killed in a worksite accident involving a tipper truck in Changi.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) said that it was informed of the fatal accident at 31A Tanah Merah Coast Road on Friday.

The spokesman said the worker, an Indian national, was on the left of a tipper truck at a T-junction, when the tipper truck made a left turn and knocked him down.

In its statement, MOM said that it was the first fatal accident related to the Changi East project, which includes the construction of Changi Airport Terminal 5.

The ministry is currently investigating the accident and all operations involving tipper trucks have been suspended.

A 32-year-old man, believed to be the driver of the tipper truck, has been arrested in connection with the case.

The developer of the Changi East

project is Changi Airport Group (CAG) and the occupier of the work site is Samsung-Koh Brothers Joint Venture.

In 2015, the joint venture between Koh Brothers Group and Samsung C&T secured a \$1.12 billion project from CAG for development works on a three-runway system, which will allow Changi Airport to handle a growing number of flights.

The worker who died was employed by Koh Brothers Building & Civil Engineering Contractor, a subsidiary of mainboard-listed Koh Brothers Group.

In response to queries from The Sunday Times, a CAG spokesman confirmed the accident on Friday, saying: "We are sorry for the loss of life due to the accident this morning at the Changi East worksite."

CAG is assisting the authorities in their investigations and working with the contractor to provide assistance to the foreign worker's family, the spokesman said.

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The 27-year-old foreign worker was killed on Friday after a tipper truck knocked him down at a worksite in Tanah Merah Coast Road. The Ministry of Manpower said that this was the first fatal accident related to the Changi East project, which includes the construction of Changi Airport Terminal 5. PHOTO: ST READER

SCDF trainee in critical condition after motorcycle crash in Bartley

22-year-old was riding pillion when bike collided with another

Ng Huiwen

A 22-year-old paramedic trainee with the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) is fighting for her life after being involved in a motorbike

crash earlier this month.

Ms Nuruljannah Mohammad Razib and an SCDF full-time national serviceman (NSF) were on their way to a work-related event on a personal motorbike on Feb 11 when they collided with another motorbike in Bartley Road East.

The accident occurred near the slip road towards Kaki Bukit Avenue 4 in the direction of Tampines Avenue 10 at about 10am.

The police are investigating the accident.

The SCDF said the pair are attached to Paya Lebar Fire Station.

Ms Nuruljannah, who was riding pillion, suffered serious injuries in the accident, the SCDF said. She was taken unconscious to Changi General Hospital's (CGH) intensive care unit, where she is currently warded.

The SCDF said the 23-year-old NSF and the other motorcyclist,

who is 48, were taken to CGH in a conscious state. Both suffered injuries to their body and limbs.

The NSF was discharged from hospital on Feb 14 and is currently recuperating.

A letter written in Malay by Ms Nuruljannah's father, Mr Mohammad Razib Samsudin, addressed to the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, has been published online.

He wrote that his daughter is in a

critical condition and asked those attending Friday prayers to also pray for her.

The SCDF said yesterday that it is providing all necessary assistance to its two officers and their families.

Commander of the 2nd SCDF Division Alan Toh has been in contact with the families, while a team of SCDF officers are providing emotional support to the officers' families and colleagues.

In April 2017, Ms Nuruljannah was among five Singaporeans who were near the scene of a terror attack in Stockholm, Sweden. In the incident, a truck ploughed through a crowd outside a department store, killing four people.

Ms Nuruljannah was there on a graduation trip with her fellow nursing diploma graduates from Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

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The first of three two-hour walking tours in the Orchard Road area was held yesterday. Here, the group is viewing an art installation outside Ngee Ann City mall titled Orchard: A Stroll Between Valleys. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

Walking down memory lane in Orchard Road

4 NUS past, current students aim to tell shopping strip's tales via its architecture

Jolene Ang

Wisma Atria is one of Orchard Road's main shopping malls, but the site where it stands used to house Wisma Indonesia – a building with a Balinese-style roof and carved murals that until 1982 housed Indonesia's embassy, national airline Garuda's office and a hotel popular with visitors from the country.

Meanwhile, underneath Singapore's main shopping street runs a canal that carries rainwater out to sea, while the road itself got its name from the nutmeg and fruit orchards that were once located there.

Many older Singaporeans will be familiar with these historical facts but younger ones may not, so in an effort to get more people interested in local history, four current and past postgraduate architecture students from the National University of Singapore (NUS) are aiming to tell these stories through the architecture of the Orchard Road area.

Yesterday, they held the first of three two-hour walking tours, led by their mentor and NUS architecture professor, Dr Lai Chee Kien, as part of The Future of Our Pasts Festival, which began on Feb 16 and ends on March 17.

It is one of 11 projects being showcased at the arts-and-media festival, which is organised by Yale-NUS College in support of the Singa-

pore bicentennial.

The walk starts in Killiney Road, where a part of the Stamford Canal is visible from the street, and ends outside Ngee Ann City mall, where the group has created an art installation with modelled old-fashioned artefacts, including library books, drainpipes, road barricades and water pumps.

Arts school lecturer Carolyn Oei, who was one of around 30 people to attend the first tour, believes Singaporeans who do not take the time to learn about their country's physical history are missing out.

"It's like having the Great Wall of China in your backyard and not visiting it," said Ms Oei. "This festival (The Future of Our Pasts) is a meaningful one."

Three of the group's members – Ms Wu Yu-Chen, 24, Mr Lin Derong, 26, and Mr Yeo Zheng Hang, 28 – have graduated with a master's degree in architecture and are now practising architectural designers.

Mr Poh Wei Bing, 25, is finishing the final year of his master's programme.

Ms Wu said they wanted to explore how the architecture and urban design of buildings along Orchard Road have been affected by the drain.

"Everything was levelled up," she said. "Lucky Plaza is prone to flooding (because it is low-lying)... Over the years, the architecture changed because people realised the power of nature, and regulations changed as well."

"The stops we planned along the tour route signify the history of all this architecture."

Mr Lin said: "To many of us, Orchard Road is very distant. It doesn't link to our daily life as it did for people in the past."

The next tours, which are fully booked, will be held on March 2 and 9.

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Panel Discussion



Suan Teck Kin
Head of Research,
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The walk starts in Killiney Road, where a part of the Stamford Canal is visible from the street, and ends outside Ngee Ann City mall.

SDP launches election campaign, plans contest for same areas as 2015

Linette Lai
Political Correspondent

The Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) yesterday launched its election campaign, in anticipation of a general election taking place by the end of this year.

At the launch event, party leaders, including secretary-general Chee Soon Juan and chairman Paul Tambyah, laid out plans for the rest of the year. These include the release of policy papers on issues such as housing and the cost of living, as well as a planned pre-election rally at Hong Lim Park in September.

Dr Chee said the SDP plans to contest in the same areas as it did in the 2015 General Election, and recruit between 300 and 500 volunteers to help with groundwork.

The party had previously fielded 11 candidates to contest in Holland-Bukit Timah and Marsiling-Yew Tee GRCs, as well as Bukit Batok, Bukit Panjang and Yuhua SMCs, but failed to win a seat.

The SDP is the first political party to launch its campaign for the next general election, which must be held by April 2021. There has been speculation over whether the election will be called this year.

Addressing an audience of about 200 at the Mandarin Orchard Hotel, Dr Chee pointed to the importance of an early start. "It's important for us because we don't know when the elections are going to be held. By the time they are called, it's going to be too late. So we are starting early."

In his speech, Professor Tambyah highlighted issues such as rising inequality, cost of living and recent lapses in government institutions, which he said have not been adequately addressed.

"What I am concerned about is that no one takes responsibility or ownership of these disasters," Prof Tambyah said of the lapses. "The

blame always seems to fall on a low-ranked individual, rather than on a system or culture that does not encourage critical thinking."

Other speakers included party vice-chairman John Tan, treasurer Bryan Lim, assistant treasurer Wong Souk Yee and central executive committee members Damanhuri Abas and Khung Wai Yeen. They elaborated on the party's plans for the year and appealed for donations and more volunteers.

Asked if he would do anything differently for the next general election, Dr Chee said the SDP would intensify its groundwork.

The SDP had initiated a meeting between several opposition parties last year to discuss the possibility of forming an opposition coalition led by former PAP MP Tan Cheng Bock, who formally applied to register a new political party last month.

Yesterday, Dr Chee reiterated the call for greater coordination among opposition parties, saying: "We can't guarantee that we will get there in the months to come, but the important thing is that we need to get the initiative going."

He added in response to a separate question on the Workers' Party: "As far as the Workers' Party is concerned, we continue to encourage all opposition parties to come together and we do what we can to facilitate it. Whatever comes of that, it is beyond our control."

He was also asked if SDP would run out of steam if elections are held later than expected, to which he replied: "If that was the case, we would have lost steam by now."

Among those who attended the campaign launch was former Democratic Progressive Party chief Benjamin Pwee, who has applied to join the SDP. The party's central executive committee is expected to go through his application next month.

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Preparations for Trump-Kim summit

Trump rules out S. Korea troop pullout in Kim deal

He says everything is on the table, while not revealing details about bargaining cards

WASHINGTON • President Donald Trump has ruled out reducing the strength of US forces in South Korea as part of a deal in his upcoming summit with North Korea.

"No, it's not. That is not one of the things on the table," Mr Trump said last Friday when asked if he would consider pulling out some of the 28,500 troops from South Korea.

Mr Trump, answering questions as he held a meeting at the White House with a senior Chinese official, said he would not reveal his bargaining cards ahead of this week's summit in Hanoi.

Pressed on what he would offer, Mr Trump quipped: "Everything is on the table."

Mr Trump again hailed his relations with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, whom he met in June in Singapore in the first-ever summit between leaders of the two countries.

The US leader will face pressure to produce more concrete results when they meet over two days at their second summit.

The businessman turned President has long mused about withdrawing US troops from allied countries, seeing them as an ex-

pense shouldered by the United States for countries that are often commercial competitors.

Heightening speculation that the troop issue could be on the table, the US and South Korea have been struggling to finalise a new arrangement on how much Seoul will pay for the US military presence, with the Trump administration pressing for more.

North Korea has never formally ended the 1950-1953 war with its neighbour and officially is seeking reunification with the South.

But any bid to remove American troops from South Korea would face strong pushback from the US Congress and Japan, whose conservative government is deeply wary of North Korea's intentions.

Also, South Korean President Moon Jae-in has shown little interest in booting out US troops, in contrast with some predecessors who shared his left-of-centre ideology.

Meanwhile, Mr Trump's national security adviser John Bolton has cancelled plans to travel to South Korea ahead of this week's summit, Mr Bolton's spokesman Garrett Marquis said.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS



Workers using flowers to form the US national flag at the North Korea-US summit media centre in Hanoi yesterday. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who reportedly left Pyongyang in an armoured train yesterday, could take at least 2½ days to travel the thousands of kilometres through China to Vietnam. PHOTO: REUTERS

Kim sets off by train for Vietnam

HANOI • North Korean leader Kim Jong Un set off by train for Vietnam yesterday for his second summit with US President Donald Trump, to take place this week, Russia's Tass news agency reported.

The report came hours after Vietnam announced that Mr Kim would make an official visit in the "coming days", as the South-east Asian country prepares to host the summit on Wednesday and Thursday.

No details of the leaders' travel arrangements, or for the summit, have been officially released.

A landmark first summit between Mr Trump and Mr Kim in Singapore last June led to a promise by Mr Kim to work towards complete denucle-

arisation on the Korean peninsula. But progress has been scant.

Mr Kim left the North Korean capital of Pyongyang at around 5pm in an armoured train, Tass said, citing a North Korean diplomatic source.

North Korea's state media has yet to confirm either Mr Kim's trip to Vietnam or his summit with Mr Trump.

It could take Mr Kim at least 2½ days to travel the thousands of kilometres through China by train to Vietnam.

Mr Kim's train reportedly crossed the Chinese city of Dandong late yesterday, where guests at a hotel facing the border bridge from North Korea were suddenly asked to leave last Friday. The hotel was closed yesterday for impromptu renovations.

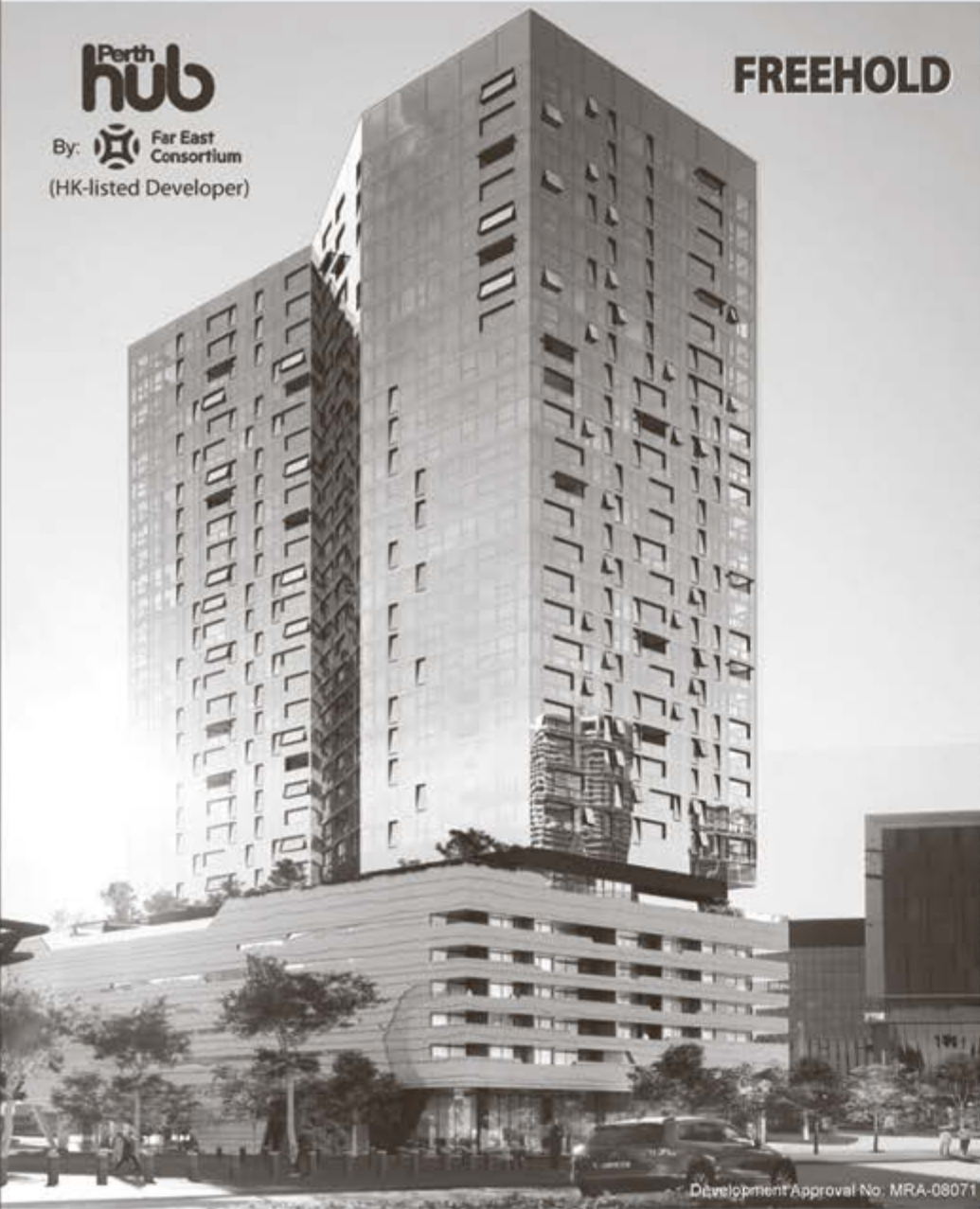
His train is expected to stop at the Vietnamese border station of Dong Dang, where he will disembark and travel the 170km to Hanoi by car, sources said earlier.

Meanwhile, Mr Kim reportedly told US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that he did not want his children to live with the burden of nuclear weapons, a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer involved in high-level diplomacy over North Korea's weapons was quoted as saying yesterday.

[TIGHTER SECURITY continued on A18](#)

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Preparations for Trump-Kim summit

T-shirts with the images of US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at a store in Hanoi. PHOTO: EPA-EFE



HANOI CASHES IN

From haircuts to cocktails, everyone wants a piece of the Trump-Kim action

HANOI • Kim Jong Ale? Rock It, Man? Or how about a glass of Peace Negroniations?

Bars in Vietnam’s capital, Hanoi, are cashing in on the second summit between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un this week with special concoctions to mark the high-stakes diplomacy.

Other enterprising businesses are also seeking to profit: While one would think a T-shirt bearing the face of one of the world’s most infamous dictators would normally be a tough product to market, anything sells in summit-mad Hanoi.

One barber is even offering free haircuts to anyone wanting to copy the distinctive hairdos of Mr Trump and Mr Kim.

“This beer was inspired by the pure streams of Mount Paektu between North Korea and China,” Ms Nguyen Thi Huong Anh, manager of Hanoi’s Standing Bar, said of the “Kim Jong Ale”, brewed especially for the summit.

The mountain is the highest on the Korean peninsula, at about 2,750m, and the official birthplace of the late North Korean leader, Kim Jong Il.

“It’s a volcano so the beer has a hot and spicy flavour with a soft and fresh aftertaste,” Ms Anh said.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Korea’s



Nine-year-old To Gia Huy checking out his Kim Jong Un-style haircut while 66-year-old Le Phuc Hai admires his Donald Trump-inspired dyed hairdo at a salon in the Vietnamese capital, Hanoi, ahead of the US-North Korea summit this week. PHOTOS: EPA-EFE, REUTERS



favourite soju spirit has emerged as the ingredient of choice in Hanoi.

The Tannin Wine Bar in Hanoi’s Old Quarter is offering the “Peace Negroniations”, a summit-inspired take on the classic Negroni cocktail, made with pink-grapefruit-flavoured soju, vermouth and a drop of Angostura bitters, manager Antoine Ursat told Reuters.

The bitters reminded him of Mr Trump, he said.

The nearby Unicorn Pub is offering a special summit drink named “Rock It, Man”, which includes soju, bourbon and Fireball Cinnamon Whisky, along with pineapple juice, vanilla and grenadine.

“The Fireball is as strong as Trump. It’s sweet but it’s also very fiery,” said the pub’s co-owner, Mr Trinh Xuan Dieu. “When you drink



A bar in Hanoi has a cocktail commemorating the US-North Korea summit. PHOTO: REUTERS

it, it tastes really hot at first, but it ends with sweetness.”

And the name of the concoction?

Before they broke the ice at their Singapore summit, Mr Trump had mocked Mr Kim and his efforts to

build nuclear missiles by calling him “Rocket Man”.

Also in Hanoi’s Old Quarter, Mr Truong Thanh Duc’s T-shirts featuring Mr Trump and Mr Kim have attracted a curious crowd in the bustling labyrinth of streets and market stalls popular with tourists.

“There’s no need to talk about Trump as he’s already a great man. Everybody knows that,” said Mr Duc. “But we should always encourage Kim Jong Un to give up his dictatorship for his people.”

“That’s why I put his image on the T-shirt,” he said.

Mr Duc is hopeful the summit can help promote reform. “Kim Jong Un is a dictator but now he has changed,” said Mr Duc. “He has to give up that status to shake hands with the developed world.” REUTERS

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NOTICES

Tighter security at border station

FROM A17

Mr Kim made the rare personal comments when Mr Pompeo visited Pyongyang in April last year to lay the groundwork for the summit in June, said former CIA official Andrew Kim, as reported by South Korea’s Yonhap news agency and the Wall Street Journal.

Mr Andrew Kim said the North Korean leader, when asked whether he was willing to end his nuclear programme, told Mr Pompeo: “I’m a father and a husband. And I have children.”

“ ‘And I don’t want my children to carry the nuclear weapon on their backs their whole life.’ That was his answer,” Mr Andrew Kim said at a lecture at Stanford University’s Asia-Pacific Research Centre, where he is a visiting scholar.

Before he retired from the CIA, Mr Andrew Kim established the agency’s Korea Mission Centre in April 2017, and accompanied Mr Pompeo – who was then CIA director – to Pyongyang last year.

Mr Kim Jong Un is visiting Vietnam at the invitation of President Nguyen Phu Trong, who is also general secretary of the ruling Communist Party, Vietnam’s Foreign Ministry said in a statement earlier yesterday.

Vietnamese police have stepped up security around the border station ahead of the North Korean leader’s arrival.

Soldiers were deployed to Dong Dang train station yesterday and along the road to Hanoi, said Agence France-Presse reporters at the scene, who saw several military vehicles and communications equipment in the area.

Security personnel tried to prevent anyone from taking photos and videos in the area, and soldiers screened everyone who entered Dong Dang station.

On Tuesday, Vietnam will ban traffic on the road that Mr Kim is expected to take to Hanoi from the station, state media said.

The preferred location for the summit is the Government Guesthouse, a colonial-era building in central Hanoi, three sources said last Wednesday.

They said the Metropole Hotel would be a backup venue and Mr Kim could possibly stay at the Melia hotel. A Reuters witness saw workers laying communication cables in the streets behind the Metropole late last Friday.

At the same time, some foreign media organisations have received a note from Vietnam’s Foreign Ministry prohibiting live broadcasts in and around the Melia hotel and Hoan Kiem Lake in the centre of Hanoi.

The JW Marriott hotel, where Mr Trump is widely expected to stay, will also be out of bounds to live broadcasts, according to a copy of the note reviewed by Reuters. Several hotels around Hoan Kiem Lake said they had been told by the authorities to restrict access to their rooftops.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

KL to take over 4 tolled roads to appease voters

Hazlin Hassan
Malaysia Correspondent
In Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia’s Pakatan Harapan (PH) government, facing a stiff battle to retain a seat in a Selangor by-election, announced yesterday that it is in talks with infrastructure firm Gamuda to take over four highways in the Klang Valley, and reduce toll charges.

The move is seen as a major political step to appease disgruntled voters who say that the nine-month-old government has failed to both reduce the cost of living and fulfil some of its electoral promises, including abolishing charges at tolled highways.

“Pakatan Harapan has promised in its election manifesto to take steps to acquire highway concessions and abolish toll collection in

stages,” the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) said in a statement, referring to the talks with Gamuda as “a first step” towards this.

The highways involved are the Lebuhraya Damansara Puchong, Sistem Penyeruaian Trafik KL Barat, Lebuhraya Shah Alam and the SMART tunnel in Kuala Lumpur city centre.

The statement said that once the highways are taken over, the existing tolls will be abolished.

But vehicle users will have to pay a “congestion charge” equivalent to the existing toll fees for six peak hours a day.

During the off-peak period of between 11pm and 5am, commuters will travel for free. At other non-peak periods, commuters will pay discounted rates of up to 30 per cent off the existing toll rates.

The revenue collected from the congestion charge will go towards

the operations and maintenance of the highways and repayment of borrowings, the PMO said.

Any surplus collected will be channelled into a fund to improve public transportation in Malaysia.

Apart from cost of living issues, many voters have become disenchanted with the PH government over missteps by its leaders, including the revelation that several ministers held fake degrees or had fudged their academic qualifications.

The decision to scrap the tolls comes ahead of a by-election in the state seat of Semenyih, in Selangor, next month.

The PH candidate is facing stiff competition to retain the seat against the opposition Barisan Nasional coalition.

Former premier Najib Razak said the toll announcement was politically motivated. “PH promised this to the people and they have been waiting for it, but since PH is announcing it during the Semenyih by-election campaign period, it appears as if it is simply fishing for votes,” he was quoted as saying by The Malaysian Insight news site.

hazlinh@sph.com.sg

Naruhito vows to share the people's joys and sorrows

Japan's Crown Prince aims to build on his parents' legacy when he ascends the throne



Crown Prince
Naruhito and
Crown Princess
Masako in a
photo provided
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Walter Sim
Japan Correspondent
In Tokyo

Crown Prince Naruhito, who turned 59 yesterday, has vowed to build on his parents' legacy by being close to the people when he becomes emperor on May 1.

His father, Emperor Akihito, 85, and his mother, Empress Michiko, 84, have actively sought to bridge the distance between the monarchy and the commoner since assuming their roles in 1989.

In doing so, the Emperor has defined the role as “the symbol of the state and of the unity of the people” as stated in Japan’s post-war Constitution. The soft power icon has also expressed remorse over the war that was waged under the name of his father, Emperor Hirohito.

Crown Prince Naruhito told a press conference last Thursday that he holds in solemn regard his upcoming role as emperor, saying: "I want to earnestly fulfil my duties by always being close to the people, and sharing with them their joys and sorrows."

While some right-wing conservatives continue to see the emperor as a demi-god and frown upon efforts to build ties with the public, the Crown Prince said he hopes for more chances to listen to the voices and concerns of the Japanese.

Emperor Akihito is set to step down from the Chrysanthemum Throne on April 30, in the first abdication in 200 years.

This will mark the end of the Heisei (achieving peace) era, with the new era name set to be announced on April 1, a month before Crown Prince Naruhito becomes the 126th monarch in a semi-mythical unbroken hereditary lineage that dates back to 660BC. Emperor Akihito's decision to abdicate has given experts a rare head start in choosing the new era's name.

Last Friday, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the Crown Prince discussed domestic and foreign affairs in a rare meeting.

US President Donald Trump is set to be the first world leader to get an audience with the new emperor during a state visit planned for May 26. Some 2,600 guests, including foreign dignitaries, will attend the official coronation ceremony scheduled for Oct 22.

Crown Prince Naruhito, whose name comprises words that mean "benevolent" and "virtuous" in Japanese, said he sees building international goodwill as one of his most important imperial duties.

The emperor-in-waiting, who graduated with a history degree from Tokyo's Gakushuin University and has a doctorate in civil law from Oxford, said he wants to continue to update the imperial throne while upholding tradition as "a new wind blows with the new era".

He also noted as a matter of concern the shrinking imperial family. There are only 18 imperial family members, 13 of whom are women.

Princesses lose their royal status when they marry commoners and are barred from ascending the throne. There will be only three heirs when Prince Naruhito becomes emperor: his younger brother, Prince Akishino, 53; his nephew, Prince Hisahito, 12; and his uncle, Prince Hitachi, 83.

Crown Prince Naruhito and his wife, Crown Princess Masako, 55, have a daughter, Princess Aiko, 17.

Crown Princess Masako, a former top diplomat, has been suffering from a stress-related disorder said to be the result of stifling restrictions imposed by the traditional household. But the Crown Prince, in seeking the public's understanding, noted that she has gradually been taking on more duties.

"She won't be able to do everything overnight even as the volume of her official duties increases with the change in her status," he said. "But with the warm wishes of the public and while watching her health, she is continuing her efforts to get better."

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Clashes on Venezuela border over US-backed aid efforts

Govt forces skirmish with protesters aiming to oust Maduro and install self-proclaimed leader

BOGOTA (Colombia) • Venezuelan security forces skirmished with protesters at a border bridge yesterday, with rubber bullets and tear-gas fired in the clash over aid shipments between President Nicolas Maduro's government and US-backed opponents trying to drive him out of power.

The site is on a stretch of near-dry riverbed on the Venezuelan frontier crossed by four narrow international bridges where opposition leader Juan Guaido's supporters yesterday planned to start delivering hundreds of tonnes of humanitarian aid to their near-starving nation. Others will attempt to bring food and medicine from Brazil.

Last Friday, a smaller attempt ended in bloodshed: Venezuelan soldiers killed at least one woman and injured a dozen people trying to deliver aid at the remote southern border with Brazil.

Fears ran high that yesterday's operation would end in more, possibly wider, violence. Mr Maduro has

closed international entries and ordered security forces to bar the supplies, saying they are part of a plot devised in Washington.

His rival, Mr Guaido, the head of the National Assembly, defied a travel ban and arrived on the Colombian side of the border last Friday.

Mr Guaido, whose claim to be interim president is recognised by the US and dozens of other countries, has pleaded with soldiers to stand aside and let the aid through.

Until now, the soldiers have remained loyal to Mr Maduro.

Volunteers are preparing to don white clothing to walk across the bridges that link Cucuta, Colombia, to Venezuela in hopes of bringing relief to their compatriots.

Colombian President Ivan Duque said a "human torrent" will help get the aid across, there and elsewhere. "There are more than a million volunteers, and we continue to invite more to join," Mr Guaido told CNN in an interview.

Across Venezuela, there will be



Venezuelan soldiers being held after driving into Colombia from the Venezuelan side of the Simon Bolivar International Bridge in Cucuta yesterday. President Nicolas Maduro's government has closed bridge crossings on the frontier being used by protesters to deliver aid. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

large demonstrations to demand that the aid be allowed in and that Mr Maduro leave office, he said.

The initiative is a watershed in Mr Guaido's campaign to replace Mr Maduro, which began only last month, and it is a gamble.

US sanctions on the oil industry, Venezuela's only real source of hard currency, threaten further suffering in a nation wracked by hyperinflation and hunger.

The sanctions are part of a two-pronged approach by Mr Guaido and his US backers – strip Mr Maduro of cash to buy even the scraps of food he has been handing out to citizens, and then ride to the rescue with critical supplies of their own. Traditional aid groups have shunned the effort, saying it is politically tainted.

But Mr Guaido's supporters say they are determined, even in the face of overwhelming force.

"We don't know how yet, but one way or another the aid is getting in," said Ms Katherine Vega, a

Border tensions



SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

31-year-old nurse from the Andean town of Colon who volunteered to cross from Cucuta to help distribute food and medicine.

Meanwhile, Mr Guaido's supporters rallied last Friday at a music festival in Cucuta, organised by British billionaire Richard Branson, in fields next to where aid supplies are being stored. Mr Guaido made a surprise appearance, alongside Mr Duque and Chilean President Sebastian Pinera. Organisers said more than 300,000 people attended.

Mr Maduro's government mounted a smaller competing event on the Venezuela side.

But the regime closed the bridge crossings and supporters were sleeping on and around them, backed up by a heavy police and military presence. Patrols on motorcycles and in Toyota trucks crisscrossed towns and cities near the border. Guardsmen set up checkpoints on major roads and hundreds of soldiers were deployed to the Tienditas Bridge. Armoured ve-

hicles and personnel carriers rolled throughout the area.

Pictures showed some Venezuelan soldiers being detained by Colombian forces after crossing the border. US President Donald Trump has said all options are open if Venezuela continues to block the supplies. The confrontations cap a month-long run of protests and sanctions aimed at unseating Mr Maduro, 56, the hand-picked heir of the late president Hugo Chavez.

After Mr Guaido invoked Venezuela's Charter on Jan 23 to declare himself head of state, the US urged other nations to recognise the 35-year-old as president.

Mr Elliott Abrams, the US special representative for Venezuela, has told reporters in Cucuta that Mr Maduro's days in power are numbered. "Venezuela will be free, maybe tomorrow, maybe the day after, we don't know," he said last Friday. "But we do know very well that Venezuela is going to end with a democracy." BLOOMBERG

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An officer from the Indian Central Reserve Police Force on guard in Srinagar, Kashmir, yesterday. India and Pakistan both claim Kashmir in entirety but control different parts of the state. The two nuclear-armed countries have gone to war thrice over Kashmir. PHOTO: REUTERS

India-Pakistan tension

Decades of animosity

Terrorism, Kashmir the two main issues that continue to blight any peace prospects

Nirmala Ganapathy
India Bureau Chief
In New Delhi

On Nov 26, 2008, Pakistan's then Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi was visiting India when news broke that 10 terrorists from Karachi in Pakistan were attacking different locations in India's financial capital, Mumbai.

Mr Qureshi did not cut short his visit as expected. Instead, he went on to address the Indian Women's Press Club in Delhi. Halfway through the session, he got up, saying he had to take an urgent call. He came back in a sober mood and soon after left the club, flying back to Pakistan the same day.

In 2017, then Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee, in his autobiography *The Coalition Years 1996-2012*, revealed that he had called Mr Qureshi that day and asked him to leave at once, saying: "Mr Minister, no purpose will be served by your continuing to stay in India in these circumstances."

The attackers from Lashkar-e-Tayyaba laid siege to Mumbai for 60 hours, striking different locations including five-star hotels, a cafe, a railway station and a Jewish community centre.

The attacks, which shocked the world, left more than 174 people dead, plunging ties between India and Pakistan to a new low.

Peace talks were called off and, for years, India sought action against the terror group, but without success. However, the two nuclear-armed neighbours did step back from the brink of war.

PULWAMA ATTACKS

Now, years later, another terror attack has brought the two countries to the brink again.

On Feb 14, 19-year-old school dropout Adil Ahmad Dar, who joined the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed militant group last year, drove an explosive-laden vehicle into an convoy of buses carrying paramilitary soldiers on a busy highway in Kashmir's Pulwama district. Over 40 of the soldiers from India's Central Reserve Police Force were killed.

India said the attack originated in Pakistan, where the terror group's founder Masood Azhar lives, and accused Pakistan's army and spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence, of having a hand in the attack. But Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan denied any involvement by his country.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned that security forces had been given a free hand to retaliate, amid an upsurge of nationalis-



Goods trucks at the border town of Chakothi in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

tic fervour within the country that had spilled out against Kashmiris living in different parts of India. Hindu nationalists held protests and harassed Kashmiri students, forcing them to flee to safety.

"There is a hardening of position vis-a-vis Pakistan and Kashmir at a national level. Violence in Kashmir (or the Kashmir issue) was not a political issue in Chennai or Hyderabad (before). Now there are big posters of those who lost their lives (in Kashmir) in southern Indian cities and protests," said Dr D. Suba Chandran of the National Institute of Advanced Studies.

HISTORY AND KASHMIR

The animosity between the two South Asian neighbours is rooted in history.

Pakistan was carved out of India when the British left the country in 1947. It was a bloody partition that displaced more than 14 million people along religious lines and led to mob violence in which over a million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were killed.

It also led to the genesis of the Kashmir problem – both India and Pakistan claim the state in entirety.

India controls about half the area of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, while Pakistan has control over the rest that now includes Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir.

Both countries have gone to war thrice over Kashmir. India accuses Pakistan of fuelling a separatist movement in Kashmir and of using terror as a state policy. It also claims Pakistan is sheltering terror groups. But Pakistan denies having a hand in the insurgency, which has seen thousands of people killed since 1989.

PEACE EFFORTS COMPLICATED

India's former foreign secretary Lalit Mansingh has viewed Pakistan as a foreign policy challenge since independence in 1947.

"It is complex and challenging. I don't think anybody has found the

COMPLICATED

It is complex and challenging. I don't think anybody has found the right answer and the solution... There is no foreseeable hope that dialogue will resume soon.



**INDIA'S FORMER FOREIGN SECRETARY
LALIT MANSINGH**

right answer and the solution. The special dialogue (peace process) has its ups and downs. There is no foreseeable hope that dialogue will resume soon," said Mr Mansingh.

But it is not for lack of trying.

In 1999, the late prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee boarded an inaugural bus from Delhi to Lahore. The image of Mr Vajpayee – who many believe came closest to a breakthrough with Pakistan – smiling and waving as he sat in the bus brought hope of a resolution.

In Lahore, he got off the bus to hug then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, calling it a "defining moment in South Asian history".

Yet months later, the Pakistani army sent troops into Kargil in Jammu and Kashmir, leading to a conflict with India. While India won, the incident left the peace process in shambles.

When Mr Modi took office in 2014, he invited his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif and other South Asian leaders to his swearing in, and in December 2015, he made a surprise visit to Pakistan.

This raised hopes that dialogue would resume.

But a terrorist attack on India's Pathankot Air Force base in 2016,

which killed seven security personnel, ended any efforts to mend ties.

The cost of terrorism has been high for India. Since 2005, 707 people have lost their lives and more than 3,200 people have been injured, according to reported Indian government figures.

For India, terrorism remains the core issue in any peace dialogue, while Pakistan insists Kashmir is the key issue.

WHAT NEXT

In 2016, India revealed that it had carried out surgical strikes on terrorist launch pads along its de facto border with Pakistan, in an apparent retaliation against a terror attack on an Indian army camp in Uri which left 19 soldiers dead.

Such a strike could happen again. Mr Modi, under pressure to act, would likely order some kind of limited military action, analysts said, apart from keeping up the diplomatic pressure.

So far, the United States has called on Pakistan to "end immediately the support and safe haven provided to all terrorist groups operating on its soil", and the United Nations Security Council has issued a statement identifying Jaish-e-Mohammed as having claimed responsibility for the Pulwama hit.

And in a sign that the pressure may be working, Pakistan last Friday took control of a mosque and seminary complex in Bahawalpur said to be the headquarters of the terror group.

"Because of the terror attack as well as the coming elections, things have become even more complicated. We do not know how it is going to take shape," said Professor Gulshan Sachdeva of the Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Mr Mansingh added: "Coercive measures have been hinted at by the government, but I am almost certain some form of retaliation will take place. We have to wait and see, when and how this is done."

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Literally pleasing: A new chapter in bookselling

Physical bookshops making a rapid comeback in China, thanks partly to state support

Lim Yan Liang
China Correspondent
In Beijing

It is 10pm on a Thursday, and the couture shops of ultra-fashionable Sanlitun neighbourhood in downtown Beijing have wound down, but one area remains a hive of activity. Just a year ago, that would have been the raucous bars of what the locals called Zhangjie – or dirty bar street – but today that space has been cleaned up, replaced by Sanlian Taofen bookstore, a 24-hour paeon to the physical book.

The stylish store’s dark wood panelling, two-storey bookshelves and snaking, elevated walkways are meant to evoke the Xishan Travel Map, a famed inkwash landscape painting that came out of the Northern Song dynasty.

Pathologist Zhang Chunbo, who was at the bookshop with his teenage son that night, said he was

drawn by the atmosphere and wide selection of magazines. He visits the bookstore at least once a week. “I can stay as long as I like and browse as much as I want, which is why I like to come here after dinner,” said the 49-year-old. “I never buy anything, but my son likes to get a coffee and read on his phone.”

The state-linked bookstore is symbolic of how China is bucking the global trend of declining brick-and-mortar bookshops – albeit with a bit of help from the government.

The rise of e-commerce and e-books has led to the downfall of international chains like Borders, and even those that survive, like Barnes and Noble, are struggling, reporting annual declines in sales since 2014.

But where its foreign counterparts are shrinking and returning to the basics of selling books, Chinese bookstores are growing larger and more numerous, while competing on aesthetics and versatility.

China had 225,000 bookstores at the end of last year, 4.3 per cent more than in 2017, according to an industry report out this month.

The trend looks set to continue, with two-thirds of the country’s 62 book chains surveyed saying they planned to open at least five new stores this year, according to the Bookdao New Publishing Institute, an industry consultancy. Some private chains, like Sisyphus Bookstore, even expect to open more than 100 outlets this year.

This is a marked reversal from the early 2000s, when within a decade, half of China’s privately-owned bookstores closed because they were not profitable.

Like their overseas counterparts, China’s booksellers had been hit by online rivals, the e-reading trend, as well as increased rent and labour costs, Mr Ji Gang, a partner at con-



Sanlian Taofen, a 24-hour bookstore that opened in Beijing’s Sanlitun neighbourhood last April, draws a steady late-night crowd through the week. Its attractions include an unusual layout of elevated walkways and two-storey bookshelves, as well as a cafe and sitting space. ST PHOTOS: LIM YAN LIANG

sultancy firm Roland Berger, told China Daily.

So how did China breathe new life into the dying brick-and-mortar book trade?

Although it initially decided to let market forces do their work, Beijing intervened after the wave of closures was accompanied, predictably, by lower reading rates.

A national survey in 2015 found that the average Chinese person read 4.56 books a year, far lower than neighbours South Korea (11) and Japan (9).

To encourage “spiritual nourishment”, the authorities in 2016 issued a national guideline to support the bookshop industry which, among other things, gave it access to substantial state funding. The capital, Beijing, for instance, saw its annual budget for bookstores grow sixfold to 50 million yuan (\$10.2 million) last year. The city boasts some 6,800 bookstores, or double that of second-place Chengdu.

“We cannot rely on the market to ease the brick-and-mortar bookshops’ existential difficulties, and a government policy supporting them is absolutely necessary,” deputy head of Beijing’s bureau of radio and television Zhang Su was



The Bookworm in Beijing opens till midnight daily, hosts regular writers’ talks and groups, as well as a long-running annual literary festival.

quoted as saying then.

The government’s plan is that, with the financial boost, bookstores can morph into cultural centres where consumers go for coffee and meals, but hopefully also to read and buy books, said 21st Century Economic Research Institute analyst Li Guo.

But critics said the fall in reading rates could be due partly to the shrinking space for discussion and increased censorship since President Xi Jinping took office in 2013.

The government has tightened controls over the publishing sector. Last year, for example, the department in charge of publications was

put under the direct command of the Chinese Communist Party’s Central Publicity Department. Such moves have led to regression in the Chinese publishing industry.

In 2015, China was nominated in six categories at the annual London Book Fair International Excellence Awards, including fields as diverse as literary translation and educational learning resources. This year, it has one nomination: for Bookstore of the Year.

But readers The Sunday Times spoke to are happy with the growing number and variety of bookstores.

Recent graduate Zhang Xin said that visually distinctive, all-in-one bookstores – like the Singaporean-founded chain Page One’s 24-hour branch a stone’s throw from Tiananmen Square – appealed to her, making her a regular visitor to them.

“I feel that most Chinese will prefer these large stores where each visit feels like a new experience,” said the 23-year-old.

“These modern bookstores are landmarks where friends may meet, which means you may attract people who otherwise would never have stepped into a bookstore.”

yanliang@sph.com.sg

Weather

Singapore

24/34°C

Today

Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.

Outlook

Monday & Tuesday: Afternoon thundery showers.

Air quality

PSI 44-56 (Moderate)

24-hour reading as of 8pm yesterday

Sunrise

7.16am

Sunset

7.21pm

Moonrise

11.41pm

Moonset

12.02pm

North Fair

East Fair

Central Fair

South Fair

West Fair

Tides

Today: 2.2am (2.9m), 8.30am (0.8m), 2.31pm (3.1m), 9.01pm (0.8m).

Tomorrow: 2.56am (2.9m), 9.16am (0.8m), 3.28pm (2.8m), 9.37pm (1.1m).

British PM faces calls to quit within three months

LONDON • Mrs Theresa May must resign as British Prime Minister and Conservative leader later this year after delivering Brexit, according to politicians at the highest levels of her own government.

Mrs May has promised her party she will stand down before the next general election, slated for 2022, but she is likely to face pressure to go within the next three months.

Once Britain leaves the European Union, and local district elections on May 2 are over, the Prime Minister will have no reason to stay in office, one senior minister said, speaking privately. Brexit is scheduled for March 29.

A person familiar with another minister’s views agreed with the

timescale, arguing that the Prime Minister should leave in the summer, so a new leader can be in place in time for the party’s annual conference in October.

A third senior member of Mrs May’s administration pointed out that the Tories had no way of formally seeking to remove Mrs May before December under the party’s internal leadership rules.

Starting the clock on Mrs May’s departure means that even if Britain leaves the EU as planned at end-March, with a divorce agreement in place, the political uncertainty that has defined British politics since 2016 is likely to continue.

Since losing the Conservative Party’s ruling majority in a disas-

trous election campaign in 2017, Mrs May has suffered an almost uninterrupted torrent of political blows and criticism over her personal leadership and handling of the Brexit negotiations.

A succession of Cabinet ministers quit in protest at her handling of the EU negotiations, and she survived a vote of no-confidence in her leadership of the party and another in the government itself.

Last month, Mrs May’s Brexit deal was rejected in the biggest Commons defeat for any administration in over a century, and last week, three Tories decided they could no longer stay in her party and defected to form a new group.

Last December, in the gravest crisis of her leadership, Mrs May made a promise to her party that she would not fight another general election as party leader.

That bought her enough support to survive the vote of no-confidence in her leadership of the Conservatives, although one in three Tory members of Parliament voted against her. BLOOMBERG

Singer R. Kelly charged with 10 counts of sex abuse

CHICAGO • R&B superstar R. Kelly has been charged with 10 counts of aggravated criminal sex abuse, some involving minors.

The bombshell indictments in Chicago last Friday marked a major shift in the Kelly saga, which has seen the 52-year-old for decades accused of child pornography, sex with minors, sexual battery and operating a sex cult.

Nine of the new charges concern minors aged 13 to 16, a Cook County court official told Agence France-Presse, without specifying the number of victims involved.

The artist – whose real name is Robert Sylvester Kelly – was taken into custody last Friday night after arriving at a Chicago police station in a van with heavily tinted rear windows, said the Associated Press.



Nine of the new criminal sex abuse charges against singer R. Kelly concern minors aged 13 to 16, said a court official.

Kelly having sex with a young girl, which the lawyer gave to the Cook County State Attorney.

Mr Avenatti tweeted about Friday’s developments: “After 25 years of serial sexual abuse and assault of underage girls, the day of reckoning for R. Kelly has arrived.”

CNN, which obtained a copy of the tape announced by Mr Avenatti, described it as “clear and explicit”.

The network said two scenes show a naked man who appears to be Kelly engaging in several sex acts with a female.

It is the second time Cook County prosecutors have charged Kelly with a sex crime: after a dramatic trial that also involved a sex tape, the musician was acquitted of 21 counts of child pornography in 2008.

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, BLOOMBERG

WorldBriefs

Toxic alcohol kills 93 in India

NEW DELHI • Ninety-three workers have died and at least 200 others have been hospitalised in north-eastern India after drinking toxic liquor, officials said yesterday, in the latest case of alcohol poisoning in the country.

The victims, who include many women, are mostly tea plantation workers in the Golaghat and Jorhat districts.

Initial investigations revealed that the drink contained methanol, which is fatal when consumed in large amounts.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, DPA

Apps send health data to Facebook

SAN FRANCISCO • A Wall Street Journal report last Friday said many smartphone apps were sending highly personal information such as menstrual cycles and body weight to Facebook, without notifying users.

The report based on the paper’s own in-house tests showed that intimate data could be shared with Facebook using a tool designed to help target ads, even if app users were not members of the leading social network.

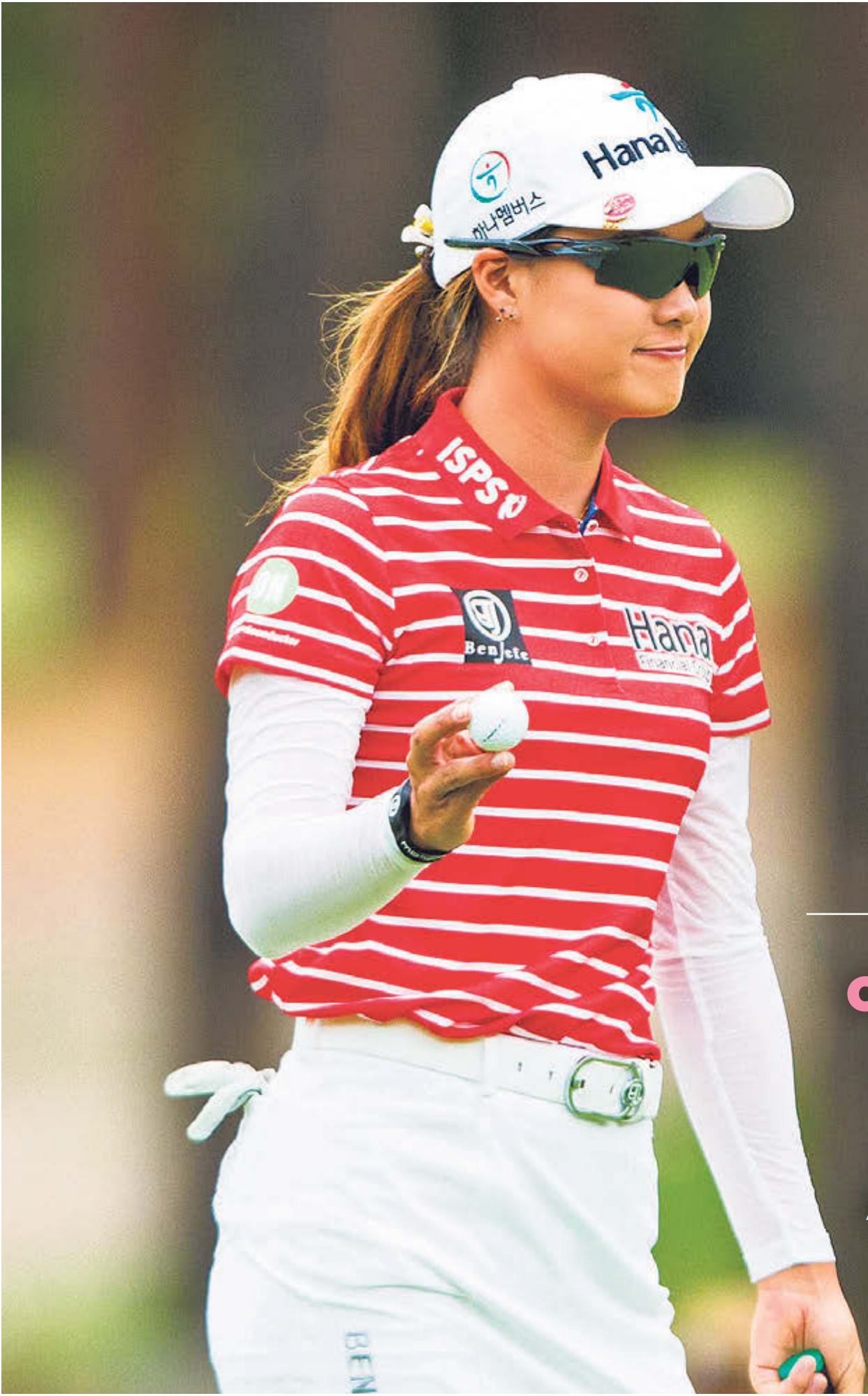
Facebook said data sharing across apps on iPhones and Android-powered devices is standard industry practice when it comes to how mobile advertising works.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Saudi schools to teach Chinese

RIYADH • Saudi Arabia and China have agreed to include the Chinese language in the curriculum at all stages of education in Saudi schools and universities. The decision was made last Friday during the visit of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the Chinese capital Beijing, said a report by the Saudi Press Agency.

The Chinese language will enhance the cultural diversity of students in the kingdom, and contribute to achieving the future national goals in the field of education in Vision 2030, the report said. XINHUA

A photograph of professional golfer Minjee Lee. She is wearing a white cap with 'Hana' and 'Hana Air' logos, sunglasses, a red and white striped polo shirt with 'ISPS' and 'Hana' logos, and white pants. She is holding a golf ball in her right hand and a golf club in her left.

Swing

by sphgolf

Minjee

LEE

EN ROUTE TO FULFILLING
BIG TARGETS

BY BENNY TEO

CHINESE APP OFFERS 100 GOLF
COURSES AND MORE

BY JEREMY THESEIRA

AUSTRALIAN COACH TAKING NATIONAL
SQUADS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

BY GODFREY ROBERT

A Rolex Explorer II watch with a white dial, black bezel, and metal bracelet. The watch is shown with its distinctive five-pointed crown design in the background.



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WATCH FEATURED SUBJECT TO STOCK AVAILABILITY

OYSTER PERPETUAL EXPLORER II

editor's
letter

BY
BENNY TEO

IN TIME WITH
ROLEX

Asia's leading female golf tournament, the HSBC World Women's Championship (HWWC) is returning next week and the field is as strong as ever. With Michelle Wie returning to retain her crown, Swing talks to Australian ace Minjee Lee on what it takes to win this US\$1.5 million event billed as 'Asia's Major'.



Minjee Lee (left) hopes to be in tip-top shape for 'Asia's Major' in Singapore.

AUSSIE FLAG FLYING HIGH

SWING: Before last season's HWWC, you've set a goal to be within the top 6 in the world in the year ahead and did it, finishing second on the LPGA's Money List as well as scoring average. Looking back, how did you think you've fared and what do you hope to achieve this year?

ML: My biggest goal last year was to try to get into the Top 10 of the Rolex rankings so I think I managed to do pretty well there and I had a really great season. Came out with one win on the European Tour and one on the LPGA, and a whole lot of Top 10s. I feel like I've met those goals pretty well because I really did put a lot of work into all aspects of my game and continued to do so.

As for 2019, I've set more statistical goals, not result goals because my ranking's already inside the Top 10; obviously world No.1 is there.

But I think if I get most of my sta-

tistical goals, I'll be pretty close to getting there.

Karrie Webb won in Singapore in 2011 — the last Australian to do so. What's the state of Australian golf now?

I think every year it's been growing and growing. I know there's a lot of new initiatives and obviously the 'My Golf' programme; things that will make women and girls and everybody in Australia try golf and get into the game.

I think it's grown so much in the last — I don't know how many — years and I think it will continue to do so, I guess we're going in the right direction.

Going back to the Rolex rankings, how hard is it to get to world number one?

It's so hard to win out here and even just being in contention every week is getting tougher and tougher. The

girls are coming out stronger and stronger.

The depth of the field, I think, is in its peak and it will continue to get harder and harder, so I think it elevates the Tour. So it's great how that is happening.

Do you think it's possible to see a player as dominant as Karrie, Annika, Lorena anymore?

Obviously times have changed and I guess it's a little bit different because of technology, and working out — things like that probably weren't as big when they were in their prime.

So many things now come into factor like length and how good your short game is.

I'm sure they were amazing; they've had amazing careers but now I think it's sort of changed a little bit.

How do you feel as you get ready to head to Singapore this

HSBC WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Date: Feb 28-Mar 3, 2019

Course: Sentosa Golf Club — Tanjong Course

Purse: US\$1,500,000

Ticketing: www.hsbcgolf.com/womens/buy-tickets-online

coming week?

These couple of weeks have been sort of trying to get myself back into playing competitively. I've had quite a few weeks off so hopefully, by the time I get to Singapore, I'll be in tip top shape.

Have you given your brother Min Woo (who recently turned professional and played

at the Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship), any tips as he starts out on his professional career?

Not too many tips. He doesn't really ask me that many questions. He's really competitive so sometimes I just tell him to soak it all in and having one bad week is not the end of the world.

Just stay patient and persistent and you'll do really well.

What's your favourite Major?

The US Open. Since I was little, it's always been my dream to win that, so US Open has been a really special Major to me.

How important is it to you to get a Major win?

Obviously everyone wants to win a Major and it'll mean the world. I think that's sort of the next goal that I'm going towards, so it'll be really special to me.



BY
GODFREY ROBERT

NEW BLOOD, FRESH FACES IN SGA NATIONAL SQUADS

AUSSIE COACH BALLARD AND SERVICE PROVIDERS WILL FORM MAIN SUPPORT FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE PROGRAMME

When there is competition, there is motivation to raise one's individual performance so that one can stand up to the challenge. In the process, if there is complacency, it will be shed and if one suffers defeat, there is the urge to come back fighting. These traits were seen in the junior golf scene recently in Singapore following the extra drive and push by the forward-looking and dynamic Singapore Golf Association to create a buzz among the youngsters.

And when the SGA announced its national squads for the various categories, it came as no surprise that among the 51-golfers named the majority was from the younger set.

They were the cream of a group who gave of their best in several junior competitions and are ready to take on the bigger challenges offered in the region.

And the means to that end was achieved through a combination of hard work, perseverance, learning and development.

The SGA recognised the importance of setting up the pathway of golf development in Singapore.

From the formation of the Junior Squad to Rookie Professional Programme, the SGA continued its quest in creating national heroes and developing the game of golf.

The 2019 squads consist of new blood and fresh faces who have shone in the extensive local tournaments in Singapore.

And it is encouraging to see many younger golfers aspiring to work hard towards country representation and personal excellence through sport.

The pathway has been clearly defined from the Junior, Development, National squads, to the Rookie Professional Programme.

The newly hired full-time national coach Matt Ballard, a renowned Australian golf master from Queensland, and the service providers will form the main support team behind SGA's High-Performance Programme.

Said Ballard: "The SGA High Performance programme will compose of continuous athlete testing, mental and courage management skills, en-

hanced skills and conditioning systems. There will also be plans for local and overseas training camps with a larger emphasis on preparation for events."

The Rookie Professional programme is beginning to reap rewards as the five youngsters — Marc Ong, Jesse Yap, Joshua Shou, Abdul Hadi and Gregory Foo are making some impact on the regional scene.

In the current Qualifying School of the PGA Tour China Series, Hadi did well to take the first-round lead with a five-under 65 in Guangzhou.

After two days he remained at the perch, sharing top spot with Japan's Ottawa Keisuke.

It was also encouraging to see Andre Chong hit a 324.3-metre drive at the SGA Long Drive Challenge at Sentosa last month.

The 2019 squads are:

Men's National: Lucius Toh, Low Wee Jin, Donovan Lee, Brandon Han, Justin Kuk, Andre Chong, Sean Lee, James Leow (overseas), Nicklaus Chiam (overseas), Wong Qi Wen (overseas).

Women's National: Goh Jen, Shannon Tan (overseas), Hailey Loh, Anne Fernandez (overseas).

Development: Boys: Fabian Fernandez, Jeryl Tan, Austin Tan, Daryl Low, John Ho, Nathan Tan, Aidil Amani Norazman, Ryan Wong, Tommy Tan, Charles Alliston (overseas), Hiroshi Tai (overseas).

Development Girls: Nicole Mok, Angel Lim, Calista Chen, Shang Yu, Jillian Kuk, Shayne Lim, Inez Ng, Linnah Loh (overseas), Linette Chua (overseas), Yoko Tai (overseas).

Junior Boys: Irvyn Tan, Jayden Loh, Shmuwel Soh, Ng Wei Jun, Brayden Lee, Trevor Ng, Yap Zhe Rong, Ethan Lim, Giovanni Goh, Ryan Ng.

Junior Girls: Rachel Sim, Sarah Lim, Gwen Tan, Jaymie Ng, Guo Jun Xi, Tatiana Ang.

GOLF CLUBS CHIP IN TO SUPPORT SGA PROGRAMMES

With fewer golf clubs in Singapore following the loss of Jurong Country Club and Raffles Country Club because of land acquisition, the challenge facing the Singapore Golf Association for its programmes gets bigger.

Jurong CC and Raffles CC had always been supportive of the SGA programmes and have hosted their events previously. In recent times, three clubs have been providing yeoman service to the SGA with their opening up of their facilities to engage the SGA programmes.

Sentosa Golf Club, Warren Golf and Country Club and the Laguna National Golf and Country Club are combining efforts to make a difference to the game in the light of land scarcity and an ageing population.

Sentosa GC recently staged the Discover Golf Carnival and Long Drive Challenge, just days before the SMBC Singapore Open. On the SGA initiatives, Sentosa GC GM and Director of Agronomy Andy Johnston, said: "It is imperative for the growth of the game that golf clubs and organisations work together to promote junior golf and support the sport."

"We have been committed to utilising our hosting of world-class events to afford opportunities to the next generation of Singaporean golfers through several initiatives, and will continue to support the great work the SGA are doing in this area to help grow the game at junior level."

"They have a strong programme in place with some great junior events planned, that will only promote the game here. The more we can work together to foster the sport's development, the better it will become in the long term."

Warren and Laguna are regular venues for the National Ranking Tournaments, National Opens and 9-Hole Junior Series. The tournaments include a six-month Inter-Club League and 3-Day and 4-Day Tournaments.

In fact, all the remaining Singapore clubs also chip in to help the SGA whenever possible.

Warren GM Jinder Aujla said: "At Warren we have an extensive junior programme. Our goal has always been to grow the number of juniors in our programme, as they could also be the future members of the club."

"We not only look internally but also are always on the lookout, through our resident professionals, to see how we can encourage juniors who may not even be our members."

"That's the reason why we have always supported SGA's initiatives on junior programmes. Other than our own programmes we have hosted a number of SGA junior events and assisted in their programmes."

Laguna also helps the Rookie Professional Programme by allowing the golfers to practise at their facilities.

In all, the SGA runs close to 30 events a year. And the clubs also raise funds for charity through golf as a form of giving back to society.

An enthusiastic Ross Tan, the SGA president, said: "It is encouraging for golf in Singapore as all clubs are starting to work close together towards the common goal to grow the game. We are appreciative of the support from the clubs, enabling us to reach out to more golfers and increase the number of activities for the community."

— Godfrey Robert

photo courtesy of Singapore Golf Association



Andre Chong (right) hit a 324.3-metre drive at the SGA Long Drive Challenge at Sentosa last month.



SPH Golf members will soon enjoy access to over 100 courses in China at preferential rates with the Gaotao golf booking mobile app.

In addition to its vast number of clubs within its database, Gaotao also offers heavily discounted rates, with discounts of up to 65% off usual rates.

Launched in 2015, Gaotao is the brainchild of Professor Tommy Wu, an avid golfer from China who, through his years of research and management experience on golf projects, has gathered a network of over 240 key industry contacts such as golf course general managers, industry personalities and major golf media leaders.

With the Gaotao golf booking app, golfers enjoy a streamlined process of securing a tee time at clubs such as Kunming Sunshine Golf Club, Nanshan International Golf Club and Anhui Huangshan Pine Golf & Country Club. Upon selecting a club, available dates

are shown, along with the rates per golfer and the booking is finalised once payment is made via the golf booking app.

Gaotao goes well beyond booking tee times, with the ability for golfers to rate and share their experience after playing at any of the courses available on the app and hosting a “Members Cup” – a biweekly tournament that is held at different courses to promote friendly competition among Gaotao members, as well as meet new people.

In an exclusive partnership with the SPH Golf Card, new registrants who sign up to be a member at the upcoming SPH Golf Travel Fair 2019 will have the option of adding on a VIP Gaotao membership at a rate of S\$60, regardless of the membership

category. After which, members will be provided a unique user ID and password that will give them full access to the app.

With this, SPH Golf members will be able to gain premium access to the Gaotao golf booking platform and book tee times at specially discounted rates at courses across China.

• Discover the finest golf destinations in the region and exclusive equipment deals at the SPH Golf Travel Fair 2019, happening from 21 to 24 March at Takashimaya B2.

TWO LUCKY GOLFERS RETURN TO THAILAND

Two golfers were rewarded for their recent travel to Thailand with an all-expenses paid trip back to catch the Honda LPGA Thailand at Siam Country Club from February 19 to 22.

A prerequisite to being eligible, golfers who entered the month-long contest must have at least played two rounds of golf in Thailand anytime between January 1 and February 9.

Sponsored by the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the all-expenses paid trip includes return air tickets on Thai Airways, three nights accommodation with daily breakfast, a spot to play at the Pro-Am game on February 20 and opening day admission tickets to the 13th edition of the Honda LPGA Thailand 2019, the nation's largest international golf tournament.

“It's a golfers delight to play at the Pro-Am game and to also have the opportunity to watch the Honda LPGA Thailand 2019,” said Manpreet Singh, a partner at Litmus Consulting and one of the selected winners.

He adds: “Being selected to return to Thailand, play at the Old Course of Siam Country Club and walk with the pros is a pleasant surprise. I'm looking forward to an exciting time watching all the action of the tournament live.”



Seah Wei Kok and Manpreet Singh (right), winners of an all-expenses paid trip to catch the Honda LPGA Thailand.

BIGGEST GOLF TRAVEL FAIR DUE IN ONE MONTH

Next month, the country's biggest golf travel fair will make its way to Takashimaya Square on the basement of one of Orchard Road's largest malls.

Building on the success of the inaugural event last year, the 2019 edition will offer much more within an even bigger venue, and will be extended to spread over four days instead of three, from March 21st to 24th.

There will be plenty of deals on offer with an expected 30 individual booths consisting of the finest golf clubs in the region such as Angkor Golf Resort, Bintan Lagoon Resort, The Els Club, Foison Golf Club, Horizon Hills Golf & Country Club, Kota Permai Golf & Country Club, Palm Springs Golf & Beach Resort, Pattana Golf Club & Resort, Ria Bintan Golf Club, Sofitel Angkor Phokeethra Golf & Spa Resort, Thana City Country Club and the three courses under the Laguna Golf Group in Bintan, Lang C6 and Phuket.

Hotellers such as Renaissance Pattaya Resort & Spa, Swissotel Bangkok Ratchada, and AccorHotels' Hotel Baraquad Pattaya MGallery by Sofitel and Mercure Pattaya Hotel will also be present at the fair.

The fair will also feature four Country Pavilions helmed by the tourism boards of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. Within each Country Pavilion, they will be showcasing the very best golf

ing destinations from their respective nations.

Further up north, Chinese golf booking app Gaotao, will also showcase their more than 100 clubs in a unique partnership with SPH Golf Card, the region's most comprehensive non-estate golf club program.

Visitors to the fair can also expect exhibitors such as Royal Brunei Airlines, China golf tour operator Haikou Nice Golf Co, and Sakura Residence – Malaysia's first luxury prefabricated landed property that utilises Japanese technology, nestled in Sunway Iskandar, Johor.

Developments such as Leisure Farm in Malaysia and Sanctuary Cove in Australia will also be showcased at the fair.

The Takashimaya golf section, a staple of the department store's Sports Department, will boost the fair's retail offerings with two dedicated areas to showcase various golf equipment brands.

Eco-friendly golfing gear, Green Golf Fashion will also be present at the fair.

In making the SPH Golf Travel Fair a wholesome family affair, there will be a putting area for the younger ones, specially put together by the Singapore Golf Association. — Jeremy Theseira

EVENT DETAILS

Date: March 21 to 24, 2019
Venue: Takashimaya Shopping Centre, Basement
Admission is Free



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CHINA
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Foison Golf Club
Golf Paradise Haikou Hainan China & Sanya, A Golf Paradise Hainan China
- Haikou Tourism Development Commission
- Sanya Tourism Development Commission
- Haikou Nice Golf Co., Ltd
- Hainan NICE International Travel Agency
- Haikou R&F Mangrove Bay GC
- The Dunes at Shenzhou Peninsula
- Sheraton Resort at Shenzhou Peninsula
- Harriot Resort Yalong Bay Sanya
- Sanya Yalong Bay GC
- Sanya Sun Valley GC
- Sanya Luhuitou GC
- Sanya Begonia Bay Peninsula GC
Shanghai Gaotao Infotechnology

INDONESIA
Bintan Lagoon Resort
Laguna Golf Bintan
Padang Golf Sukajadi
Palm Springs Golf & Beach Resort
Radisson Golf & Convention Center
Ria Bintan Golf Club
Riverside Golf Club
Sentul Highlands Golf Club
Wonderful Indonesia

MALAYSIA
Forest City Golf Resort - Legacy Course
Forest City Phoenix International Golf Hotel
Horizon Hills Golf & Country Club
Kota Permai Golf & Country Club
Leisure Farm
Sakura Residences
The Els Club Desaru Coast & Teluk Datal
Tourism Malaysia

PHILIPPINES
Tourism Promotions Board
Philippines

THAILAND
Chee Chan Golf Resort
Hotel Baraquad Pattaya
Laguna Golf Phuket
Pattana Golf Club & Resort
Renaissance Pattaya Resort & Spa
Swissotel Bangkok Ratchada
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play **it**BY
BENNY TEO

RIA BINTAN RAMPING UP IN CLASS

Golfers in Singapore have another reason to visit Bintan and play at Ria Bintan Golf Club's award-winning Gary Player course. They can now rest in the knowledge that they will be well-taken care of from the moment they arrive at Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal until they return at the end of the trip.



When the Keppel-owned golf club celebrated its 20th anniversary last year, they threw a big and hugely successful RB20 event that involves 80 or so golfers playing a unique 20-hole par 3 event on one day, and a shotgun, System 36 18-hole event the next.

To ensure that their guests travel stress-free between arrival, transfer and departure, the club had taken the extra step of arranging for fast track immigration and the use of a new lounge facility located at the Bandar Bentan Telani (BBT) Ferry Terminal for their comfort and convenience both upon arrival and at departure.

The dedicated staff at this Bintan Executive Lounge (BEL) will attend to immigration and boarding pass issuance, while refreshments and complimentary wireless internet are readily available.

Renovated in July 2018, it was formerly the private lounge for The Sanchaya, a high end luxury resort in nearby Lagoi Bay. The resort gave up part of the area for the

BEL and kept a section apart for their own guests.

In November, Ria Bintan began offering this service for all golfers who book their ferry service and golf with the club, regardless of whether they upgrade to the Emerald Class seating on board the ferry or not.

This is on top of the turnkey handling service offered at the dedicated Ria Bintan counter at Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal, which does complete check-in procedure, including baggages.

The golf club has set a goal to establish itself as a premier golfing facility to offer golfers a bespoke experience that ranks amongst the finest in the world.

"The ingredients are already there. We have a perfect piece of land that had been wonderfully sculpted by the great Gary Player, offering 27 holes of pure golfing entertainment," said Ria Bintan general manager John Yap.

"Now, the attention to detail, from staff enrichment and training, to offering thoughtful services such as fuss-free check-in and lounge access, are little steps that we are taking along the way to making Ria Bintan a truly five-star experience," said the former hotelier and general manager of Jiangyin Yangtze International Country Club in China.

In the year ahead, golfers can look ahead to some special activities culminating with the annual RB21 anniversary event in October.

A new privilege has also been extended to SPH Golf Card members for a unique yearlong benefit that allows members to play for free with green fee, twin-share buggy, twin-share caddy and golf insurance complimentary if they bring three full-paying guests.

Ria Bintan Golf Club is an award-winning golf club with its stunning Ocean and Forest courses. Its signature holes stretching from the seventh to the tenth of the Ocean course offers a stunning backdrop alongside the South China Sea.

tried & tested

NIKE VAPOR PRO

While they have stopped producing golf clubs, Nike are still very much in the game as they return to their roots - making great shoes.

Tiger Woods has been instrumental in creating a series of Free Motion shoes back in 2013 and this new pair looks like it is set to continue the ideal of comfort and performance.

With a sleek, waterproof upper and a plush Lunarlon midsole, the Nike Vapor Pro golf shoes provide lightweight comfort that helps to last an entire round without fatigue. Flywire technology provides a supportive fit that prevents foot movement during the swing.

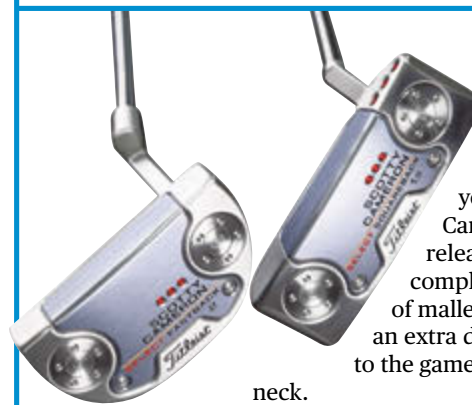
Its synthetic leather saddle offers support and a stable feel while finer details like a lining

that wraps up and over the back of heels so the foot can slip in easily, and a padded tongue that delivers a plush and premium feel when worn, makes truly a walk in a park.

Comes with a Boa closure system, it is available at all MST stores islandwide.



SCOTTY CAMERON SELECT FASTBACK 2 AND SQUAREBACK 1.5



In this new year, Scotty Cameron releases a complete range of mallets that adds an extra dimension to the game - the offset neck.

The Select Fastback 2 is mid-mallet with a plumbing neck. The familiar, confidence-inspiring setup, which provides one shaft of offset, has been incorporated into this rounded mid-mallet.

In addition to the new neck, subtle refinements have been made to the topline for a slightly thinner

look, as well as a reduction of face height.

Then comes the Select Squareback 1.5 which incorporates a new mini-slant neck that further squares off the overall shape and look at address for those seeking distinct visual cues when lining up a putt.

Additionally, the draft angle has been updated to accommodate the new neck, which also produces slightly more toe flow than its mid-bend counterpart. Similar to the Fastback 2, Scotty shaved some topline thickness for a thinner appearance from address, and reduced the overall face height.

Comes with two, customisable stainless steel heel-toe weights, stepless steel shafts and supple Black and Silver Matador mid-size grips and available at all authorised Titleist outlets.

TAYLORMADE TP5 AND TP5X

This year, TaylorMade reintroduces the latest update of the pioneering five-piece golf ball, the TP5 and TP5X.

A new Speed Layer System has been constructed with High-Flex Material (HFM) weaved into the five layers for even faster propulsion and distance.

HFM is the fastest material TaylorMade has ever used and is essentially a tightly wound spring that when compressed, generates more rebound energy for more ball speed.

The tightly wound spring characteristic of HFM also increases the force on the driver face, further increasing the speed of the golf ball upon impact.

Also putting into perspective, the additional layer or layers, when comparing against traditional three or four-piece balls, allows

TaylorMade's engineers to utilise a soft core that is wrapped by increasingly stiffer materials with each layer progressively faster than the last.

This is what they term as Speed Layer System, and that is what arguably provides for better ball control around the greens while maintaining high ball velocity off the tee.

Reportedly during a recent testing session, TaylorMade staff professional and PGA Tour player Jon Rahm, who averages 177-179 mph ball speed with the driver, was seeing numbers upward of 186 mph with an average of around 182.5 mph.

• Available at all authorised TaylorMade outlets.



FOOTJOY FURY

Usually, golf shoes are either hardwired for performance with stability as key, or they are casual with comfort and flexibility the focus.

The FJ Fury manages to combine both in a stylish set that will weather through the rigours of a four-day tournament without cramping the feet, literally.

Fully laden with features such as TruFit System to provide stability where required and comfort at the right places, there is also a soft, stretchable, one-piece Inner Fit Sleeve lasted underneath the insole board that is completely comfortable and does not let the tongue slip.

Outside, the FlexGrid MLC cage

system adds structure to the upper and locks the foot as it is being laced up, offering medial and lateral support with motion control throughout an explosive swing.

Complementing this is a new D3 Outsole that is a rigid platform for turf grabbing traction. Many more features both inside and out, such as a long life PU Foam that maintains cushioning, and an Impressions Foam that fits into any foot, creating a custom fit, completes this high performance, high tech golf shoe.

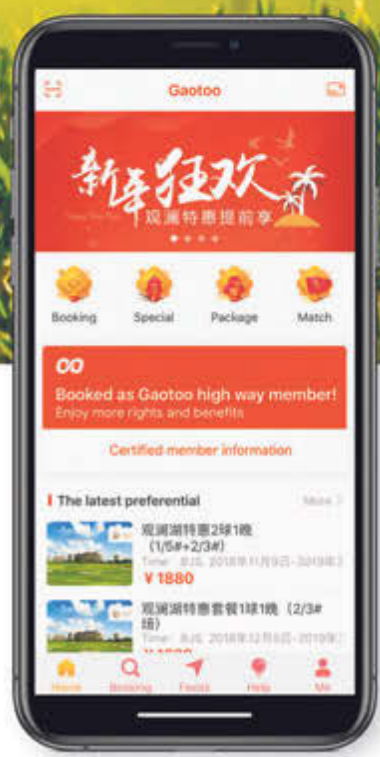
• Available now at authorised FootJoy outlets.



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Sport



Albirex beaten finally
Hami Syahin wins Community
Shield shoot-out for Home
after draw in normal time.
A30

BigMatch

THIS IS REDS' YEAR: JAMES

Ex-Liverpool goalie believes Klopp has learnt from failures and can lead team to 'Holy Grail'

David Lee

The fact that Liverpool have never won the Premier League title has been a constant source of grief for the supporters of the Reds, and glee for rival fans.

But, former Reds and England goalkeeper David James believes Jürgen Klopp's men will lift the "holy grail" this season.

"My son is in his 20s and he has never seen Liverpool win (the Premier League, which was inaugurated in 1992).

"There's always going to be doubt and pressure until Liverpool win the league," the 48-year-old told The Sunday Times last Friday in a phone interview.

"It's always described as the holy grail for Liverpool, they have won

everything else except the Premier League. The advantage has to be with (joint leaders) Manchester City in a sense because they have that experience.

"But Klopp has won leagues before. The big games haven't gone quite right for him but all that adds experience for him and the Liverpool fan in me thinks this is Liverpool's year.

"They are top of the league, and still able to win games without scoring fours and fives. It is a credit to their defence being that good.

"Maintain this level of performance, that would be enough."

Former Manchester United defender Mikael Silvestre added: "For sure it helps to know what it takes, like how United did year after year.

"Maybe Liverpool don't know their limits at the moment but they

did so well last season already. And I think they are not far off reaching their goal this year."

The two former players are in Singapore for Football Moments, the live screening of the Man United-Liverpool clash presented by Chang Beer and organised by Singtel Media at Clarke Quay.

For Liverpool's title push, they will have to overcome a United side revitalised by interim manager Ole Gunnar Solskjær.

The Norwegian stepped in after Jose Mourinho was sacked in the aftermath of their 3-1 loss in the reverse fixture last December.

Ex-United striker Solskjær has guided the Red Devils to 11 wins in 13 games since, including away victories at Tottenham, Arsenal and Chelsea.

Silvestre, who played with Solskjær from 1999 to 2007 when they won four league titles, said: "If you have to judge on the past 13 games, with just one defeat, you would give him the job straight away, because I

don't see a reason why not."

The Frenchman, 41, recalled how Solskjær was mad about the video game Football Manager while other players indulged in more "exciting" games.

He said: "Because he wasn't a starter most of the time, he would study the game and the defenders and how he should behave and what he should do.

"I have never seen such a good sub. When you come on for the last 10 or 15 minutes, it is not easy but straightaway he was having an impact because he was always reading and studying the game from the bench. It's not a surprise he became a manager.

"He is the key to all the changes. What has changed are obviously the more positive style of play and the mood, which were missing," added Silvestre, who predicted a low-scoring win for United tonight.

James gave Solskjær an A+ for his man-management skill, noting that the Norwegian would interact with

his players after every game.

"I love what he does. He makes time for every single player, even the guys on the bench he will high-five and hug them and say thanks," said the pundit, who guessed a Mohamed Salah brace will give the Reds a 2-0 win tonight.

But James also noted the Solskjær has not had to "hire and fire" anyone as the interim manager.

He said: "Once you take over the helm as full-time manager then it becomes less of a friendly relationship than a business relationship."

"A world-class player wants a world-class contract and if (Solskjær) is not in a position to give them that, then some will not perform the way they should."

davidlee@sph.com.sg

SEE ALSO A31

MAN UNITED V LIVERPOOL
Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, 10pm

SIGNS OF A CHAMPION

They are top of the league, and still able to win games without scoring fours and fives. It is a credit to their defence being that good. Maintain this level of performance, that would be enough.



DAVID JAMES, former Liverpool goalkeeper on their league title chances.



MAN UNITED V LIVERPOOL IN NUMBERS

1

Liverpool have lost just one of their last 13 Premier League away games (W9 D3), while Manchester United have kept just one clean sheet in their 12 home league games this season.

2

Both sides have averaged over two goals a game in their last 10 matches but have managed to keep only two clean sheets in their last five league outings.

7

United have won seven of their last nine home league games against Liverpool.

Leading striker Mohamed Salah (right) and dependable defender Virgil van Dijk will be the key men who can end Liverpool's league title drought this season. PHOTO: REUTERS

four-digit draw

Feb 23 2019

First ▶ 3440

Second ▶ 5127

Third ▶ 9924

STARTERS

0261 5104 5249

5844 5892 7449

8648 8657 9212

9733

CONSOLATIONS

0307 1672 3407

3936 5471 5983

6728 9556 9884

9991

Alexander-Arnold up for it against Rashford

LONDON • Two-time World Cup winner Cafu recently reminded Liverpool defender Trent Alexander-Arnold, 20, not to get "big-headed".

But Liverpool and England need not worry about his ego, after he recounted his uncomfortable afternoon in Manchester last season.

Old Trafford, where Jürgen Klopp's team head in search of the Premier League leadership today, staged what Alexander-Arnold describes as one of the hardest moments of his career last March.

That day Jose Mourinho tasked Romelu Lukaku with disturbing Liverpool's central defence with his physicality and Marcus Rashford with tormenting the young right-back with his pace. Both delivered, Rashford scoring twice inside 24 minutes from Manchester United's left flank and shaping the contest.

It was a day of despair for the boyhood Liverpool fan, but it also served as motivation for a player who would go on to feature in the World Cup for England before his

teenage years were over.

"I still use that game as a learning point," Alexander-Arnold says. "That is probably the best thing to do; look back on the harder games you've had, the tougher games, learn what I didn't do well and what I could have done better."

"The Manchester United game was definitely one of those games. "But, rather than let it get me down, or put me down and think that maybe I am not good enough at this level, it was important to use

it as a positive and see it as a learning step to improve.

"I needed to use it as motivation to make sure something like that doesn't happen again and to prove that you are better than you showed on that day."

Tuesday's Champions League stalemate with Bayern Munich was Alexander-Arnold's first competitive start since Jan 12.

His return is timely for Klopp, Liverpool's title prospects and for the opportunity to gauge his develop-

ment against Rashford at Old Trafford 11 months on.

Rashford has been in outstanding form under Ole Gunnar Solskjær, with six goals in 12 appearances for United's caretaker manager, and Alexander-Arnold's respect for the striker runs deep.

"He is a fantastic player and someone who has got bags of potential," the defender admits. "I am sure he will keep up his good form and it will be a good battle for whoever is up against him." THE GUARDIAN

BRUISED BLUES A CITY CONCERN

Guardiola feels Chelsea will put in extra effort in League Cup final after 6-0 rout by his team

LONDON • Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola is surprised by Chelsea's revolving-door policy with managers as he prepares for today's League Cup final, the match that could seal the fate of his counterpart Maurizio Sarri.

The Spaniard stated that he enjoyed City's backing in a way the Blues' former manager Antonio Conte never did, and suggested Sarri may encounter the same lack of support.

There has been mounting speculation over Sarri's future in recent weeks, after a mid-season slump best exemplified by the 6-0 humiliation in their league visit to City's Etihad Stadium earlier this month.

Guardiola believes Chelsea should adopt the same sort of long-term view City took when they employed him in 2016.

Comparisons have been drawn with his first season, when City struggled to adapt to his demand-

ing style of play, although he was keen to dismiss the similarities.

"The situation is a little bit different. In my first year, never did the club doubt me. It was never in the media that I'd be sacked if they lose this game or the other game. It never happened," he said.

"I was surprised that when Conte won the title and they lost one or two games at the beginning of the following season, people started to say he was going to be sacked.

"I said: 'Wow, but two or three months ago they won the Premier League.' The situation is completely different."

Sarri is contesting his first final as a manager. City, however, remain favourites after overwhelming the Blues the last time out.

Guardiola, though, feels the 6-0 win counts for nothing as Chelsea will step up a gear in a Cup final.

He said: "I don't like to play a team again in a short period of time, when you've beaten them by so much. They are incredible professional players and they will put in extra (for the final)."

Sarri also cannot understand why his position is under threat.

The Guardian reported that the Blues are even considering hiring their former coach and current England assistant manager Steve Hol-

land to help steady the ship on an interim basis.

Guardiola had a history of success at Barcelona and Bayern Munich and was given time and funds to overhaul City, but Sarri is unlikely to receive the same leeway.

The Italian also pointed to the praise given to Arsenal boss Unai Emery in the Spaniard's first season in the Premier League.

"We are in the first final of the season. We are one point from the top four, the same points as Arsenal, and (people say) Arsenal are doing well," Sarri said. "We are doing a little bit better because we are in a final, and yet our season is a disaster.

I don't understand.

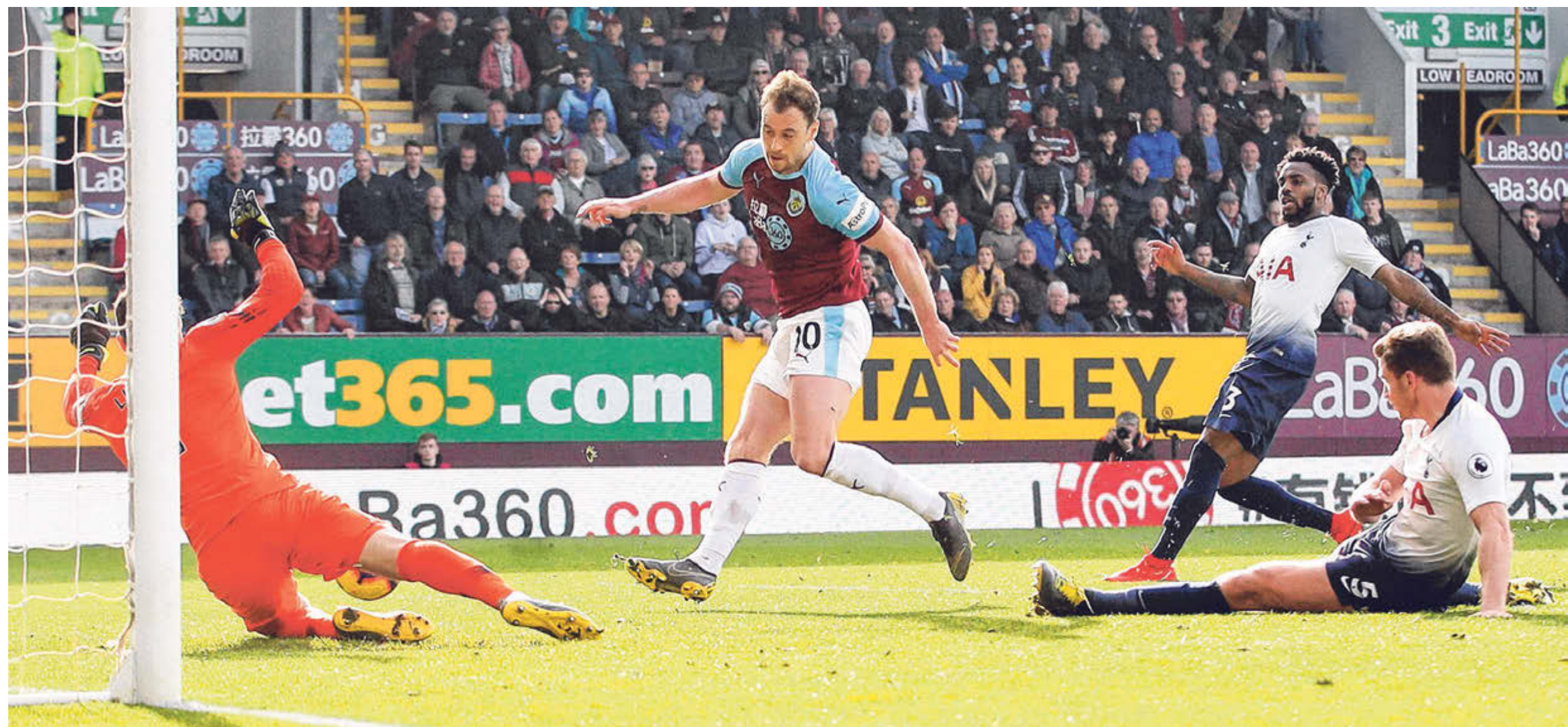
"Last season, this team gained 70 points, not 100. Then, in the summer, we changed everything. So there is another problem to solve."

Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich is not renowned for his patience, and the two transfer-window bans imposed by Fifa on the Blues could not have come at a worse possible time for Sarri.

Even a win today may only delay the inevitable.

THE GUARDIAN, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

CHELSEA V MAN CITY
Singtel TV CH111 & StarHub Ch202, tomorrow, 12.30am



Burnley's Ashley Barnes (centre) tapping the ball into the net for their second goal in the 83rd minute to beat Tottenham 2-1. It was a huge blow to Spurs' Premier League title challenge with just 11 games to go. PHOTO: REUTERS

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
YESTERDAY	
Burnley 2 Tottenham 1	
Newcastle 2 Huddersfield 0	
Bournemouth 1 Wolves 1	
Leicester v Palace	
Late kick-off	
TODAY	
Man United v Liverpool	
Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, 10pm	
Arsenal v Southampton	
Ch103 & Ch228, 10pm	

Pochettino loses cool as Spurs lose ground

LONDON • When the whistle blew for full time yesterday at Turf Moor – and perhaps also signalling the end of Tottenham's Premier League title chase – Mauricio Pochettino lost his cool and confronted referee Mike Dean.

The Spurs manager was presumably arguing that Burnley's corner which led to their first goal should not have been given.

But Dean saw no wrong in the decision and even the return of Harry Kane, after missing seven games

through ankle injury, could not save Tottenham as they crashed to a 2-1 defeat.

The loss also meant that Pochettino's men (60 points) remain five points behind leaders Manchester City and Liverpool, who have a game in hand and will leapfrog City should they win or draw at Manchester United today.

Essentially, though, Tottenham's title challenge has suffered a huge blow with just 11 games remaining.

Speaking after the match, Pochettino admitted that Spurs are unlikely to be contenders now.

"It was an important game, we needed the three points to fight for the Premier League. It is difficult for us to be a contender now," the Argentinian said.

"We made mistakes but we don't deserve the defeat, but that is football. In my mind we needed the three points to put the pressure on.

"We cannot blame anyone other than ourselves, because we were unable to win.

"I am going to accept everything (a likely punishment for confronting Dean) from the FA, but I hope nothing will go further."

Burnley striker Chris Wood opened the scoring in the 57th minute but the home side's lead did not last long. Kane showed no signs of rust and displayed great composure to net Spurs' equaliser just eight minutes later.

Tottenham had stolen late winners in three of their last four league games, but it was Burnley

who finished in the ascendancy in the 83rd minute.

Johann Berg Gudmundsson drove into the Spurs area and smashed a shot towards the far post and, with Jan Vertonghen unable to clear, Ashley Barnes tapped into the empty net to seal victory.

"We made it hard for them and that was what the game plan was," said Barnes. "We need to keep being resilient and compact. That's what we did."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, THE GUARDIAN

HeartOfFootball

Time for Solskjaer to step out of his master's shadow



Rob Hughes

There is talk of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer asking Sir Alex Ferguson into the dressing room to wind up Manchester United before today's humongous match at Old Trafford.

It says much of Solskjaer's respect for his old boss that he would contemplate such a move. But why risk it? Surely, the Norwegian has earned the right to do things in his own way, through his own words, his own managerial skills?

The world has moved on. Fergie

Fire turned United v Liverpool blue with his vow at the start of his 27-year reign to "knock Liverpool off their f***** perch!"

Mission accomplished. United won the title 13 times, and Liverpool not once in the Premier League era. And, thanks to Ferguson stoking up enmity between these two northern powerhouses of English football, this remains a fixture bordering on hatred rather than sport.

But think of today's players. Would Paul Pogba and Anthony Martial be roused by interecine English ill-will? Or Mo Salah and Sadio Mane on the opposite side?

In short, Fergie's rhetoric is history. I don't say dated, because he commanded respect from a generation of truly great players, Solskjaer among them. However, the pupil is on the threshold of not needing his master's voice. His incredible start has lifted a team that imploded in Jose Mourinho's spiteful time.

Consider for a moment what Solskjaer actually said when he was asked if Ferguson might address the players today. "He would be welcome to have his talk, the Gaffer – if he wanted to – because we know how much it meant for him to overtake Liverpool."

The Gaffer. That's Ole doffing his

cap to Fergie. Heaven knows, he would be a fool not to listen to anything Sir Alex says. There is open communication between them, and the result is that we have Manchester United back.

The Ferguson (and before him Matt Busby) attack-minded approach rather than (I promise this is the last mention) the ruinous repression of Mourinho.

Liverpool, at last in with a competitor's chance of the title, have a manager in Jurgen Klopp whose Heavy Metal football is not unlike Ferguson football. Give the game to the players; dare them to outscore every opponent.

Take care of defence, but go for

And, thanks to Ferguson stoking up enmity between these two northern powerhouses of English football, this remains a fixture bordering on hatred rather than sport.

the throat in attack.

In Salah, Klopp has a man with the killer instinct – the striker needed just 72 matches to score 50 Premier League goals, the fourth fastest player to reach the landmark behind Andrew Cole, Alan Shearer and Ruud van Nistelrooy.

But the Egyptian insists personal glory is unimportant. The title is the real goal.

I actually believe him. I've seen Salah exhibit a true striker's selfish streak. But many times he has looked like the true team man. One imagines it would be hard getting into a Klopp side any other way.

Klopp, by the way, has opinions on United.

"There's no doubt Ole will be manager next season," he says. "He deserves it, 100 per cent. Pretty much everything has changed. We see the Pogba Manchester United signed a couple of years ago, we see Herrera doing incredible running. They now use their potential."

Klopp suggests that people think Norwegians are good skiers and that's about it. But he regards Solskjaer as a manager bringing back things Ferguson stood for and using modern managerial traits as well.

"That makes them a threat again," Klopp said. "It's not the best

news for us, but for United it's brilliant."

Solskjaer waits to see if Martial and Jesse Lingard are fit to return (Martial's groin muscle is almost healed, Lingard's hamstring might need more time).

Their pace has been instrumental to United's rise up the table in the 13 games since the former manager was sacked following the 3-1 defeat at Anfield on Dec 16.

Change came like the flick of a light switch. Player after player uses post-game interviews to send messages to the board. Pogba, whose broken relationship with Mourinho bottomed when he was left out for the Anfield game, has

been the best player in Europe, never mind the EPL, under Solskjaer.

"We trust him," says Pogba. "And he trusts us."

Pogba is back to being the big beast of midfield. Marcus Rashford is again the best young striker in the league. Herrera runs like a man possessed. Victor Lindelof has gone from being a weakness to Mr Cool in the back line.

Every week is an audition to make Solskjaer the permanent manager. "We want to build this team," he says, "to be worthy of United."

stsports@sph.com.sg

ST Sports Special

Interview with newly minted ST Athlete of the Year, bowler Muhammad Jaris Goh: <http://str.sg/oEvq>





Home United players mob Hami Syahin after he converted the penalty in the shoot-out. Home beat Albirex 5-4 on penalties to win the Singapore Premier League Community Shield at Jalan Besar Stadium last night. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

HOME SNAP ALBIREX'S TITLE-WINNING STREAK

Japanese side's three-year, 11-trophy run finally broken in Community Shield shoot-out

Wang Meng Meng

The long trophy streak has, at long last, been broken. After hoovering up all 11 trophies on offer in the previous three seasons, Albirex Niigata finally tasted defeat when Home United triumphed 5-4 on penalties to lift the Community Shield last night as the new Singapore Premier League (SPL) season kicked off. The season curtain-raiser, played before 4,626 fans at Jalan Besar Stadium, ended goalless after 90 min-

utes and no extra time was played. But it was a new SPL rule that was a talking point for the White Swans, apart from a rare defeat. For this campaign, the Japanese club have to sign at least four Singaporean players, with at least two of them starting and playing the entire first half. Against Home, Albirex coach Keiji Shigetomi started with Firas Irwan and Zamani Zamri in wide midfield at the beginning. But both were replaced respectively by Sota Sugiyama and Shuhei Sasahara at the break.

The tactician explained: "When we were preparing for this match, it (replacing the two local players at half-time) was already in our plans. "The two boys are very young, still only 18. They helped to keep the shape (of the team) and worked very hard but, in the second half, I wanted to retain more possession. "That's why I brought on the Japanese players, who are able to retain the ball better." With or without the local players, what was noticeable yesterday was a change in Albirex's style. Swaggering and stylish, they won the SPL after an unprecedented unbeaten campaign that saw them win 21 and draw three of their 24 fixtures last term. Also, apart from their consecutive clean sweeps

from 2016 to 2018, Albirex did a double in 2015 by winning the Singapore and League Cups to totally dominate the local scene. Against Home yesterday, Albirex played more direct balls out of defence, did not press as intensely and the backline struggled with clearing the ball at times. Shigetomi said: "It was a very difficult game. It was very tight defensively and there's not much space on the pitch." Home's Hami Syahin was the man who denied the White Swans their space in attack. An attacking midfielder by vocation, the 20-year-old impressed in a deep-lying role and buzzed all over midfield to recover possession. In a scrappy first half, chances

were few as both sides sized each other up with a series of crunching tackles. The best chance of the game fell to the Protectors in the 35th minute, but Shahril Ishak was unable to connect with the teasing cross from Iqram Rifqi, with goalkeeper Kengo Fukudome beaten. Both teams missed two of their first five kicks during the shoot-out. At the sudden-death stage, it was Hami who scored the decisive attempt after defender Naruki Takahashi's effort rebounded off the bar. Home's gritty win delighted their new head coach Saswadimata Dasuki, who said: "In terms of effort and commitment, the boys put in a great performance. "They really want to fight for their places. And we have senior players like Shahril, Juma'at (Jantan) and Izzdin (Shafiq) guiding the youngsters. "Even at 0-0, we did not panic as we controlled our emotions and tempo. "I told the boys from the beginning that we want to go for the title. There will be lots of hard matches and we have to take care of ourselves physically and mentally."

meng@sph.com.sg

HOME AMBITION

I told the boys from the beginning that we want to go for the title. There will be lots of hard matches and we have to take care of ourselves physically and mentally.



SASWADIMATA DASUKI, Home United coach, hoping to make a bang this season.

New title sponsor AIA wants to promote active lifestyle

Just hours before the 2019 Singapore Premier League (SPL) kicked off with the Community Shield last night, the country's only professional sports league received a boost with the unveiling of a new title sponsor. AIA Singapore inked a two-year deal and the insurance group's logo will be emblazoned on the back of the jerseys of all nine clubs. AIA, who are also the shirt sponsors of English Premier League club Tottenham Hotspur and had ap-

pointed David Beckham as its ambassador, takes over from previous co-title sponsors Great Eastern and Hyundai. Although details of the sponsorship were not disclosed at the signing ceremony at Jalan Besar Stadium yesterday, The Sunday Times understands that not only will the company provide insurance coverage for SPL players, the deal includes a cash component as well. Patrick Teow, chief executive officer of AIA Singapore, said: "This

sponsorship is not just about the money, we want to put in time and effort to help the Singapore Premier League reach its objectives. "The FAS' (Football Association of Singapore) values are aligned with ours, so it was a natural choice for us to work with them." AIA, which is celebrating its centennial this year, will work with FAS for opportunities to leverage on the SPL clubs' ties with the communities and schools to encourage youth development and conduct

other outreach activities to promote an active and healthy lifestyle. FAS president Lim Kia Tong said: "With AIA Singapore's existing ties to football and notable presence in the Asia-Pacific region, we believe that this partnership will help us to achieve our goal of improving the vibrancy of local football and raising the standards of football in Singapore. "In line with the FAS' objective of increasing participation at the grassroots level, there are plans to work together to reach out and target the community, especially the youth. "I am certain that, together with AIA Singapore, we will be able to do more and we look forward to having a fruitful partnership."

Wang Meng Meng



Football Association of Singapore president Lim Kia Tong (left) sealing the deal with AIA chief executive officer Patrick Teow during the sponsorship signing ceremony at Jalan Besar Stadium yesterday. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

President at Team Singapore send-off

President Halimah Yacob was the guest of honour at a send-off ceremony yesterday for 30 Singapore athletes who will compete at the March 14-21 Special Olympics World Games in Abu Dhabi. Grace Fu, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, and the United Arab Emirates ambassador, Dr Mohamed Omar Abdulla Balfaqeeh, were also present. This edition is touted as the most unified Games because they include unified competitions that will see athletes with and without intellectual disabilities competing on the same teams. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG



SportsWorld

Fulham nearer the drop after losing to West Ham

LONDON • Fulham moved a step closer towards Premier League relegation with a 3-1 loss at West Ham on Friday. Javier Hernandez scored to cancel out the opener from Fulham's Ryan Babel. Issa Diop then headed West Ham in front and Michail Antonio added a late third. Fulham remain second from bottom in the table. In another game, Gerard Deulofeu bagged a hat-trick as Watford hammered Cardiff 5-1. DPA

CAS decision on Semenya by March 26

GENEVA • The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) said on Friday that it will deliver by March 26 a decision in the controversial case pitting South African double Olympic champion Caster Semenya against the IAAF. Semenya is challenging proposals by the International Association of Athletics Federations that aim to restrict female athletes' testosterone levels to ensure a "level playing field". AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Yang, Lee take over as joint-leaders in Thailand

BANGKOK • Amy Yang and Minjee Lee shared a narrow lead yesterday after the third round of the LPGA Thailand. Yang started out two strokes short of Friday front-runner Jenny Shin but closed the gap – thanks to six birdies – to sign for 66 and a 15-under aggregate, two ahead of Shin (70). Lee (67) carded a bogey on the ninth hole but six birdies, including a long putt on the 18th, sealed her portion of the lead. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



Jonathan Brownlee (right, in red) leading the pack during the cycling segment of the eliminator race of the Super League Triathlon at the One*15 Marina yesterday. The enduro race to decide the season's winners will be held today. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

BROWNLEE CRASHES TOP-2 PARTY

Briton wins his first race of series this season as leaders Luis, Schoeman falter in eliminator

Nicole Chia

Henri Schoeman was in prime position to overtake Super League Triathlon series overall leader Vincent Luis on day one of the Singapore finale, where doubles points were on offer. Yesterday, Luis was out of the eliminator race (300m swim, 5km

bike ride and 2km run) after puncturing his rear tyre in the first round while Schoeman led in the third and final round for the top 10 – until the last lap. He fell to fourth after a botched attempt to break away and Jonathan Brownlee seized his chance for his first win of the series this season at One*15 Marina. “I put in a lot of effort to try and

break away by myself and maybe that was a mistake,” said 2016 Olympic bronze medallist Schoeman, who trailed Luis (75 points) by 12 coming into the finale. “It is what it is and I gave everything.” Canadian Tyler Mislawchuk and Hayden Wilde of New Zealand were second and third respectively. Brownlee, the 2016 Olympic silver medallist, admitted making it difficult for himself due to mistakes in the earlier rounds that cost him energy. “But it shows what I can do with a couple of months of consistent

training and there’s no secret to this sport... I really wanted that last race,” added the Briton. “On the run I thought when I set off, that everyone looked very tired, and I thought, ‘all right, I’m going to make them really hurt’ and that’s what I did.” The Frenchman Luis was visibly dejected, saying: “This flat just ruined everything. It’s like four months of racing just gone in seconds. I think I lost 10 to 15 seconds so it was quite impossible to bridge... I did my best, I didn’t want to give up but that’s sport.”

The overall positions will only be confirmed today, but the results of the top two athletes have left the men’s field open, said organisers. Brownlee, fourth overall entering the weekend, was unconcerned about how his win affected his overall position. He said: “I haven’t won a race for a long time, I haven’t felt good in a race for a long time so it’s nice to be here and be competitive. “I enjoy racing at the front and winning. I enjoy trying to win and I enjoy being back in racing well.” Leader Katie Zaferes tightened

her grip on the women’s series when she won the race ahead of Cassandre Beaugrand of France and Australian Ashleigh Gentle. Said American Zaferes: “I did a good job of being conservative but also making sure that I stayed engaged with the race.” The enduro race today features three continuous rounds, each comprising a 300m swim, a 5km bike ride and a 1.6km run. The two slowest athletes at the end of each discipline will be eliminated.

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Nanyang B girls survive late hiccup

Xener Gill

The Nanyang Girls’ High School B Division 4x800m relay team were beaming with confidence when they arrived for the first day of the SPH Schools Relay Championships at Bishan Stadium yesterday. The girls thought that they would make it to the podium with ease, until one of their runners fell ill and vomited before the race. Coach Tan Yew Ling had no choice but to field reserve runner Lau Shen-I as the team took their places on the track. Despite the hiccup, the Nanyang girls won in 10min 57.93sec, while the Singapore Sports School (11:18.89) and National Junior College (11:25.57) were second and third respectively. “Before the competition, we told the girls that the reserve runner is as good as the main ones so they have to be mentally prepared and ready for the competition, too,” said Tan. The 15-year-old Shen-I, who replaced her ill teammate, was nervous when told about her last-



The CHIJ St Nicholas Girls’ runner (near left) beating her rival from Singapore Sports School in the C Division 4x200m final during the SPH Schools Relay Championships at Bishan Stadium yesterday. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

minute inclusion. “I didn’t feel prepared but I’m proud of the team for coming in first despite the change,” she said. Tan added: “I told her that competition is not just about winning. “Often, there will be obstacles

and challenges ahead. “We just have to take up the challenge and try to deliver our best, and she did.” Nanyang also won the B girls’ 4x200m, were second in the C girls’ 4x800m and third in the C

girls’ 4x200m. The Sports School were the biggest winners yesterday, clinching five gold medals from 12 events. The two-day meet ends today. xenerg@sph.com.sg

Johnson thrilled after conquering tricky Mexico layout

MEXICO CITY • Dustin Johnson believes that playing a challenging layout can only make him a better player, as he surged to a two-shot lead over Rory McIlroy and Matt Kuchar with a flawless four-under 67 in the second round of the WGC-Mexico Championship on Friday. The world No. 3 wiped out Northern Irishman McIlroy’s early four-stroke advantage at the Club de Golf Chapultepec to wind up at 11-under 131 for the tournament.

“The greens are really tricky, but I have done a really good job of controlling the distance with my irons and give myself lots of looks at birdies,” Johnson said on Golf Channel. A winner two years ago at the high-altitude course outside Mexico City, the American said of the layout: “It makes you focus. You’ve got to think. “You are doing a lot of calculations with the numbers and trying

to figure out how far the ball is actually going to go. It is pretty narrow, but it is tree lined, so I do like that.” Overnight leader McIlroy, who shot a first-round 63, looked set to break open the tournament with birdies at three of his first four holes but a bogey at the sixth and a double at the ninth left him with a 70. Kuchar’s six-birdie 67 kept him at the top end of the leaderboard, while Tiger Woods and defending

champion Phil Mickelson were on the move. Woods found his putting touch to get within six shots of the lead with a 66 and Mickelson rebounded from an opening 79 with the joint-best round of the day, a 65. Playing in Mexico for the first time, Woods was satisfied with his round after posting six birdies and only one bogey. “I think I got a little more familiar with the golf course,” he said.

“I got a better feel for the tee shots, the lines, the approach shots and the greens. “It helped having that one look yesterday in a competitive environment.” England’s Tommy Fleetwood and Spaniard Sergio Garcia were tied for fourth on seven under. Fleetwood started his day with back-to-back eagles and matched Mickelson’s 65, while Garcia shot a 66. REUTERS

Next 48 Hours

TODAY

BASKETBALL ABL Formosa Dreamers v Wolf Warriors (StarHub Ch201, 3pm), Spore Slingers v Malaysia Dragons (OCBC Arena, Ch202, 4pm), Saigon Heat v CLS Knights (Ch202, 6pm).

FOOTBALL English Premier League Man United v Liverpool (Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, 10pm), Arsenal v Southampton (Ch103 & Ch228, 10pm). English League Cup final Chelsea v Man City (Singtel TV CH111 & StarHub Ch202, tomorrow, 12.30am). Spanish LaLiga Atletico v Villarreal (11.10pm), Valladolid v Betis (tomorrow, 1.25am), Levante v Real (tomorrow, 3.40am) – StarHub Ch213.

TENNIS ATP Rio Open Day 7 (StarHub Ch201, tomorrow, 4am).

TRIATHLON Super League Triathlon Day 2 (One*15 Marina and Sentosa Cove, 9am).

TOMORROW

FOOTBALL Spanish LaLiga Girona v Sociedad (StarHub Ch213, Tuesday, 3.55am).

TENNIS ATP Dubai Championships Day 1 (StarHub Ch201, 6pm & 11pm).

For latest updates, go to singtelstv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.

DEROZAN FETED BUT DENIED WIN

Leonard flourish ensures no fairytale return for ex-Raptors ace honoured by Toronto fans

TORONTO • Kawhi Leonard got booed in his return to San Antonio last month. It was a much different story for DeMar DeRozan in Toronto on Friday night.

Raptors star Leonard scored a game-high 25 points and stole the ball from San Antonio's DeRozan at mid-court for the go-ahead dunk as Toronto held on to beat the Spurs 120-117 in the National Basketball Association match.

"Tonight was like a play-off game," Leonard said of the intensity of the clash at the Scotiabank Arena.

He scored the final four points for the Raptors, including his steal

and dunk off DeRozan with 15 seconds to go with the game on the line.

DeRozan tried to carry the ball up court but slipped while being pressured. Leonard snatched the ball for the uncontested dunk to give the Raptors a one-point lead, 118-117. He then sank two free throws to seal it.

It all added up to a night of mixed emotions, but for DeRozan – who had a team-high 23 points – the ending could have been better.

"It came down to a couple of plays. It sucks that the critical play was me turning the ball over. But for the most part, I think it was a

hell of a game," he said on ESPN.

This was his first trip back to Toronto since the trade in the off-season between the two teams that saw the two Los Angeles area products being swapped for each other.

The sold-out crowd of 20,060 gave DeRozan two standing ovations. The first took place during team introductions and the second came halfway through the first quarter when the Raptors honoured him with a video tribute during a stoppage in play.

"DeMar did a great job here with his nine-year run," said Leonard. "He was leading all the stats with Raptors all the time and the fans came out and showed him love."

DeRozan is the Raptors' all-time leader in points (13,296), field goals (4,716), free throws (3,539), games (675) and wins (353).

"It made it exciting, made it fun to go out there, play and compete," DeRozan added of his warm reception.

"I think that this was just that last little piece of closure for me... Being able to come back here, see familiar faces, and get that burden kind of off my shoulders.

"It's an honour. It's been practically my whole career here. To come back and get a reception like that is definitely humbling, beyond gratifying, and I appreciate it.

Leonard could only fantasise about getting the same warm welcome when the teams met on Jan 3 in San Antonio for the first time since the trade.

He scored 21 points in a 125-107 San Antonio win and was booed by the Spurs fans. DeRozan recorded his first career triple-double in that game with 21 points, 14 rebounds and 11 assists.

While Leonard asked for a trade out of San Antonio, DeRozan was stunned by the deal. After re-signing with the Raptors in 2016 he said he wanted to be a Raptor for life.

Pascal Siakam added 22 points to help Toronto (44-16) extend their winning streak to seven straight with the win.

Marco Belinelli scored 21 points for San Antonio (33-27), who have lost five of six.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



San Antonio Spurs guard DeMar DeRozan (right) shielding the ball from Toronto Raptors forward Kawhi Leonard during their National Basketball Association match at the Scotiabank Arena on Friday. Leonard scored the final four points in the Raptors' 120-117 win over ex-Raptors star DeRozan's Spurs. PHOTO: REUTERS

PlayBuddy: More than just a disability programme

Xener Gill

In 2012, Dr Teoh Chin Sim reached a turning point in her life.

She was at the Paralympics for the first time, as Team Singapore's chief medical officer for the London Games. And the experience proved to be insightful.

Over 19 days, she mingled with more than 4,000 para-athletes, and was once among a few able-bodied individuals in a dining hall.

The 54-year-old told The Sunday Times last Friday: "When I was in that dining hall, I thought: who is normal and who is abnormal now?"

"That's when something clicked in me and I realised that it's not about normal or abnormal, it's about what you do with what you have."

An inspired Dr Teoh returned from London wanting to contribute towards the disabled community in Singapore, but no one

pointed her in the right direction.

So, she decided in 2016 to start the PlayBuddy project with a physiotherapist who wanted to work with children.

It is a free, volunteer-based programme for children with disabilities. They meet to play sports every Saturday morning. They learn a sport for four to eight weeks before moving on to another.

"It's different from therapy because in a sporting environment, they start being competitive which motivates them to keep moving," said Dr Teoh, who gave a talk on transforming the disabled at the Carehab medical conference yesterday.

She works with a core group of three physiotherapists and a primary school teacher, who handles the administrative work. Equipment and location support come from national athletes such as bowler Shayna Ng and the women's rugby team.

While PlayBuddy hosts only six

to eight children regularly, Dr Teoh said: "My vision is to have 50 to 100 children playing together."

Over the past three years, PlayBuddy has evolved into a social group for families and caregivers.

Shirley Sim, the mother of Joel who has attended PlayBuddy for more than a year, says her family looks forward to the weekends.

"As a family, we all benefit because we hardly have the time to exercise, so PlayBuddy is a sacred time for the family to work out together," said the 39-year-old. "It promotes this inclusiveness which makes everyone feel at home. Our children can play and kick balls like normal children without people looking at them differently."

"The volunteers are so giving with their time and their love. They could be doing other things on a Saturday morning, but they choose to spend time with the children and I think that's really nice."

xenerg@sph.com.sg



Over the last three years, PlayBuddy has evolved into a social group for families and caregivers of children with disabilities. PHOTO: PLAYBUDDY

Weekly tweetbits



HOT SHOT

"Mummy, Dada, This is for you. You've supported me endlessly in my pursuit of sporting excellence since I was young. I wouldn't have been where I am today without the two of you. #stathleteoy #singaporebowling"

National bowler and The Straits Times Athlete of the Year Muhammad Jaris Goh continuing his acceptance speech towards his parents on social media.



SWEET TWEET

"My third time in India but a first for being out and about. Mesmerised by all the beautiful architecture." Another Athlete of the Year nominee, shooter Martina Veloso, taking a break from training in New Delhi to enjoy the sight of the India Gate.



CAUGHT ON CAMERA

"Welcome to Flagstaff @venuswilliams!" Marathoner Soh Rui Yong shared the karaoke stage with a certain tennis star this week. #waterfalls

WATCH: goo.gl/dnjshq



THROWBACK

"I've known @nicoldsquash for a long time. No one can deny the effort she gave to be No. 1 in the world for 9 years. I wish her every success!" Shuttler Lee Chong Wei acknowledging the efforts of his compatriot Nicol David. The Malaysian will retire this year.

PHOTOS: INSTAGRAM/JARISGOH, SPARKLINGRAINDROPS, RUNSOHFAST, LEECHONGWEIOFFICIAL

Fitness

HotBods

Text and pictures by Mark Cheong



Tyler Mislawchuk, 24
Canadian professional triathlete

Height: 1.73m Weight: 63kg

Exercise regimen: Every triathlete trains differently and I am a strong swimmer, so I focus more on biking and running. As such, I swim four times a week, run eight to nine times a week and cycle five times a week. A lot of my training is focused on intensity which consists of more short-power training.

Diet: I generally eat a lot, and consume 4,000 to 6,000 calories a day. The key is filling up on carbohydrates and proteins after every training session, so that I can be ready for the next. There isn't much food I avoid as long as I have a balanced diet.



Charlotte McShane, 28
Australian professional triathlete

Height: 1.6m Weight: 48kg

Exercise regimen: I swim, cycle and run on most days and can train up to six hours a day. I also hit the gym three times a week when I do mostly squats, deadlifts and low-repetition exercises, and warm up with yoga from time to time.

Diet: I am vegan and I make sure I get a good share of protein from plant sources, such as nuts and legumes. I also eat a lot of tofu and tempeh. I don't consume soft drinks and have mainly water and coffee.

SCAN AND WATCH

Hot bods videos and more:
instagram.com/straits_times



HUB TOGETHER TO GET FITTER

The Sports Hub offers various fitness classes for those who don't want to exercise alone

Laura Chia

Cynthia Gan used to attend fitness classes thrice a week. After becoming a full-time housewife 10 years ago, she tried exercising at home but found herself getting distracted by household chores.

"At home, it's purely your determination and you're affected by many other commitments," the 35-year-old told The Sunday Times.

Last week, after a 10-year break, she attended three classes in two days: pilates, bbarreless (a combination of yoga, pilates and dance) and functional fitness, a new class offered by Singapore Sports Hub this quarter.

She said: "In a class, there's the combined energy from everyone. There's no distraction because this one hour is dedicated to exercising."

"I thought that it was time to get the drive for exercising back. That's why I came back to classes."

Functional fitness strengthens muscles to enhance the performance of daily tasks such as carrying groceries.

Participants use equipment such as dumbbells and resistance bands while doing exercises such as squats, push-ups and planks.

The benefits include better posture and strength for daily activities, said instructor Derrick Chew.

"Most people who come for this class work in the office and have

stiff necks and upper backs, so the exercises here will help them alleviate this stiffness," added the 25-year-old.

Social studies teacher Lee Hui Ling found herself becoming stronger and having more stamina after attending the class four times.

"My arms used to ache after carrying a heavy stack of books but now I can carry more without feeling pain. I can also climb stairs faster without panting as much," said the 28-year-old.

"This keeps my mind away from work stress and helps me stay energised for a longer period of time. Even though I wake up at 5.45am every day, I feel less lethargic."

While Lee acknowledged that it can be more intensive, she enjoys the overall pace of the class.

"I like the variety of exercises and the pace of the instructor. He knows when's a good time to rest and he shows easier options for beginners. He's very wise in terms of adjusting the class to the needs of the people."

Chew added that the programme complements other fitness regimens as participants become stronger.

"There's no harm in doing more as long as you recover properly which is why I let them do it at their own pace," he said.

While Gan found the hour-long class tiring, she plans to continue attending the weekly class until

her 30-day class pass with the Sports Hub expires.

"I liked the class because the instructor tells you which muscle you're training and walks around to correct your position."

"Even if I don't renew my pass, hopefully I will get back the momentum of exercising and do it at home."

The Sports Hub offers a range of classes at the fitness studio in the OCBC Arena such as pilates, dance and cardio kickboxing. A 30-day class pass ranges from \$99 to \$119, with concession rates from \$79 to \$99. Walk-ins are \$20 per class.

More information on the classes can be found at sportshub.com.sg

claura@sph.com.sg



Top: Fitness instructor Derrick Chew conducting a functional fitness class at OCBC Arena.

Above: This class is among a range of fitness classes offered by Sports Hub this quarter. ST PHOTOS: DESMOND WEE

SYNERGY

In a class, there's the combined energy from everyone. There's no distraction because this one hour is dedicated to exercising.



CYNTHIA GAN, housewife, on training in a group.

CLASS BENEFITS

Most people who come for this class work in the office and have stiff necks and upper backs, so the exercises here will help them alleviate this stiffness.



DERRICK CHEW, instructor, on why people attend the classes.

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS				
Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Sun, 24 Feb 2019				
A League	Newcastle Jets	Adelaide	2.00pm	LW
A League	Western Sydney	Perth Glory	4.00pm	LW
Spanish League	Leganes	Valencia	7.00pm	LW / SB
Dutch League	ADO Den Haag	Ajax	7.15pm	LW / SB
Italian League	Sampdoria	Cagliari	7.30pm	LW / SB
Dutch League	PSV	Feyenoord	9.30pm	LW / SB
Italian League	Bologna	Juventus	10.00pm	LW / SB
English Premier	Arsenal	Southampton	10.05pm	LW / SB
English Premier	Manchester Utd	Liverpool	10.05pm	LW / SB
Spanish League	Atletico Madrid	Villarreal	11.15pm	LW / SB
Dutch League	Willem II	Alkmaar	11.45pm	LW / SB
Mon, 25 Feb 2019				
English League Cup	Chelsea	Manchester City	12.30am	LW / SB
German League	Dortmund	Leverkusen	1.00am	LW / SB
Italian League	Parma	Napoli	1.00am	LW / SB
Spanish League	Valladolid	Real Betis	1.30am	LW / SB
Italian League	Fiorentina	Inter	3.30am	LW
Spanish League	Levante	Real Madrid	3.45am	LW

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LOTTERY

TOTO

Fri, 22 Feb 2019 Draw No. 3451/2019

Group 1 Prize: \$6,807,717

• 2 Winning Shares

Sold at:

1. Sheng Siong Junction 9, 18 Yishun Avenue 9, Junction 9 #02-05/10 (One Quick Pick Ordinary Entry)

2. Cold Storage, #50 Yishun Avenue 2, Northpoint Shopping Centre #B1-09/12 (One Quick Pick Ordinary Entry)

Draw No. 3452/2019

Next Draw Mon, 25 Feb 2019

Group 1 Prize \$1,000,000^{est.}

6.30pm

Draw Venue: Singapore Pools (Private) Limited, 210 Middle Road, #01-01, Singapore 188994

No person under the age of 18 years shall be allowed to purchase a ticket or to claim any prize.

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LiveWire (Singapore Pools) (21 years and above during "Live" telecast)

SB: SportsBuz@Kong (21 years and above)

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Insight

 **Invest**
12 ways to use
your bonus
wisely
B18

B



Serving up change

From chefs to customer service officers, thousands of foreigners are still being hired for Singapore's service sector. As quotas are tightened from next year, Insight looks at the impact of the cuts.

B4&5

JEREMY AU YONG
Citizenship conundrum of ISIS brides **B2**



IT CHANGED MY LIFE
Sam Weng Cham went from mixing drinks to founding an IT firm with sales of more than \$10 million **B3**

YUEN SIN
Putting pen to paper beats the Google Calendar **B8**

IN GOOD COMPANY
Unearthed: German mole Herrenknecht **B9**



ST PHOTOS: DESMOND FOO, KELVIN CHNG, ONG WEE JIN DESIGN: CHNG CHOON HIONG

I toured the home of master potter Iskandar Jalil.

Toh Wen Li
Journalist
The Straits Times



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The Sunday Times says

Staying focused on delivering

You’ve got mail! The famous AOL e-mail alert seemed at one point to sound the death knell of snail mail. Contrast the immediacy of electronic bytes with the real-world delays of paper mail, and the advantages of the former seemed to negate the necessity of the latter. Fast forward a couple of decades, however, and while most people no longer rely on mailed missives, package deliveries have become big business thanks to the rise of online shopping. As a result, postal services

are in greater demand than ever. Witness the recent uproar over cases of mail going astray. A postman was arrested after mail was found discarded. Postal service provider SingPost was also fined \$100,000 for a series of lapses over six months in 2017. A story in this newspaper highlighted the heavy load, literally, that postmen carry each day. SingPost’s 1,000-strong fleet have to deliver three million pieces of mail every day, which works out to 3,000 pieces for every postman.

This seeming boon to the postal service business has turned into a bane. The lapses suggest that the service provider may not have been nimble enough to respond to industry disruption. Despite having first-mover advantage in the delivery service arena, it now has to play catch-up, with promises to hire more postmen and to review infrastructure and processes. SingPost’s experience is instructive for leaders in any industry facing disruption. First-mover advantage is no guar-

antee of long-term success if core competencies get eroded. Another lesson is that investment in sufficient and well-trained human resources is important if a company is to deliver on its plans. Despite the challenges, SingPost still has one crucial advantage over others: the market for its services is growing. Technology has opened new areas of growth that can sustain it into the future. It just needs to stay focused on delivery, on both its core business and its new ventures.

ThinkingAloud

Returning ISIS brides and the obligations of citizenship

Was it right of UK to strip teen ISIS sympathiser of her citizenship?



Jeremy Au Yong

Foreign Editor

Shamima Begum was just 15 when she – for reasons that only she can ever completely comprehend – stole her elder sister’s passport, fled her east London family home and headed to Syria to join ISIS.

Almost nothing was heard from her for four years until she was recently discovered in a refugee camp in north-eastern Syria, voicing a desire to return to what is ostensibly her home country.

That desire, and the subsequent actions of the British government to strip her of citizenship last week, made Begum the poster child of the dilemma countries are facing as they contend with what to do with citizens who are returning from the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Begum is not the first ISIS sympathiser to try and flee, but with the terror group now a far cry from the organisation that once controlled a taxable population of some eight million, countries around the world are bracing themselves for the re-emergence of citizens who previously defected.

The exact numbers are unclear but at least 40,000 fighters from more than 100 countries are thought to have gone to Syria to join ISIS when it declared a caliphate back in 2014.

With the dream of the caliphate now gone, many countries are expected to now deal with many trying to get back home.

But that return is posing difficult questions about citizenship and the obligations both citizens have to their countries and vice versa.

Begum’s story has resonated in part because it captures so much of the nuance of the issue.

She doesn’t fit any narrative about these fighters particularly well, yet there is enough about her to provide justification to nearly any argument one might want to make – the 19-year-old is something of a Rorschach test on returning ISIS brides.

For those convinced that the United Kingdom was right to deprive her of citizenship, Begum is a traitor, and a radicalised teen who married an ISIS fighter and has shown no remorse.

In her interviews with British



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

media, even as she was asking for sympathy, Begum never expressed any regret about joining the group.

“I feel a lot of people should have sympathy for me, for everything I’ve been through. You know, I didn’t know what I was getting into when I left,” she told Sky News. She would even go on to argue that she did nothing wrong.

“When I went to Syria, I was just a housewife, the entire four years I stayed at home, took care of my husband, took care of my kids. I never did anything. I never made propaganda, I never encouraged people to come to Syria,” she said.

For those who think the British government should not have revoked her citizenship, Begum is a misguided teen, now with a newborn, who can be treated with compassion without sacrificing security.

Tied intricately to this issue is a debate on citizenship and the

While we are rather more used to discussing citizenship in terms of what a government owes to its citizens (a discussion often framed as a comparison to benefits which foreigners gain), the matter of what obligations a citizen might have, if any, tends to get less attention. I say “if any” because it is not immediately obvious that there are any, or that there is even a consensus on whether there should be.

obligations of citizens.

While we are rather more used to discussing citizenship in terms of what a government owes to its citizens (a discussion often framed as a comparison to benefits which foreigners gain), the matter of what obligations a citizen might have, if any, tends to get less attention.

I say “if any” because it is not immediately obvious that there are any, or that there is even a consensus on whether there should be.

Those against the idea of a conditional citizenship argue that it demeans the value of citizenship and is potentially cruel or, if not, unfair.

At the heart of the cruelty argument is the despair inherent in being stateless. Someone with no citizenship is deprived of some basic citizenship rights, including many protections that countries confer upon their citizens.

The unfairness argument, in turn, stems from laws enacted that have attempted to avert the statelessness problem. In some countries, only those who have dual citizenship can have their citizenship revoked, thus creating on paper a second class of citizenship that is less durable than the first.

Having citizenship with a catch can also diminish what it means to be a citizen.

As Canadian law academic Audrey Macklin wrote in 2014 in a paper discussing laws in the UK and Canada on citizenship revocation: “Citizenship emerges as an enhanced form of conditional permanent residence, revocable through the exercise of executive discretion.”

On the other side is the argument that citizenship should be revocable because it is an implicit contract. Unlike, say, being a member of a family, citizenship is not some passive status that imposes no preconditions.

This side doesn’t suggest that citizenship can be taken away willy-nilly, but that there should be extreme scenarios in which someone’s right to be a citizen is nullified.

After all, if even families can disown their members, surely a country can too.

There is also a history of governments either locking away deviant members for life or imposing capital punishment. Both are examples of government taking actions that deprive their citizens of their core rights.

If one accepts the idea of a conditional citizenship, then the question becomes what that condition is.

In Begum’s case, those who want to keep her out would argue that treason – giving comfort and aid to an entity at war with your own country – is a reasonable condition.

I find elements in the arguments of both sides persuasive.

Intuitively, citizenship should be something that comes with duties.

This is not to suggest that the actions most frequently associated with good citizenry – obeying the laws, paying taxes, voting, doing national service (in Singapore’s case) – need to be prerequisites for citizenship. (A Singapore male who doesn’t pay taxes, doesn’t do national service and doesn’t vote is still a citizen – a citizen in jail but a citizen nonetheless.)

It is not so onerous an imposition to expect citizens not to side with the enemy in a conflict – whether this means taking up arms or simply looking after its fighters.

At the same time, the idea of a government turning its back on a citizen in this scenario poses its own set of dilemmas, foremost of which is the question of who is supposed to deal with the individual.

Begum does not just disappear because her citizenship has been revoked. She has to live somewhere.

The UK, for all its problems, would apparently be equipped to take Begum back, prosecute her and then punish or rehabilitate her. To respond to her desire to return by denying she is one of your own comes off as trying to make her someone else’s problem.

If thousands more cases are to come, involving dozens of countries, that will be quite a number of people who are supposed to be someone else’s problem. The risk this could have in making worse a terrorism problem that the denationalisation was supposed to fix is significant.

And that seems to be the rub between the conflicting sides on the citizenship issue.

While there is more than sufficient justification for unmaking a citizen, it may not always be the right thing to do.

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Mr Sam Weng Cham reliving a bartending moment at Happy Hut in Kallang Avenue for the photographer. The decision to enrol in an IT course 17 years ago changed his life, he says. Five years ago, he became a technopreneur and co-founded Transcend Solutions, which offers IT services and solutions to multinational companies. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

ItChangedMyLife

Long, tough slog to start-up success

Former bartender leaves rebellious past behind and makes good as a technopreneur



Wong Kim Hoh

Senior Writer

It was early evening and all was quiet at The Blue Cow, a now-defunct pub along River Valley Road. It was downtime for bartender Sam Weng Cham; the thirsty hordes would not troop in for their tippie until a few hours later. The 26-year-old was pensive, mulling over his future. Managing the bar was a fun gig and made him a lot of friends but the nocturnal nature of the job was starting to make him feel like a vampire. “I’d come home to hear other people’s alarm clocks ringing to wake them up for work. And when their day was done, mine would have just started,” he says. He also felt he needed a career with a better trajectory but didn’t know what that was. Idly, he picked up a newspaper on the counter, looked at the ads and chanced upon one for a part-time IT course. “I decided that was it. I knew nothing about computers; I just enjoyed playing computer games,” says Mr Sam who left school after completing his O levels. That decision 17 years ago

changed his life. Street smarts, and a couple of lucky breaks, saw him climbing the corporate ladder in the tech industry. Five years ago, Mr Sam, now 43, became a technopreneur. He co-founded Transcend Solutions, which offers IT services and solutions, including data storage, information security and access management, to multinational companies. It is now one of the fastest-growing companies in Singapore, with revenue jumping from \$1 million to more than \$6 million in just five years. Mr Sam, whose first job after leaving school was as a kitchen helper in an ice-cream parlour, is pleased, and relieved, at how far he has come. Once a wilful teen whose rebelliousness had made life difficult not only for his parents but also himself, he’s glad he managed to put it back on track again. “It took a while but I didn’t give up,” he says. Born in Ipoh and the youngest of three sons, his early life was cushy. His father managed a tin mine; his mother was a schoolteacher. Home was a spacious double-storey house, and the family had a club membership at the Royal Perak Golf Club. “Joseph Schooling used to swim there,” he says, referring to the Singaporean Olympic gold medallist. Schooling’s mother, May, was born in Ipoh. Life changed when Mr Sam was 11. His father became a bankrupt when tin prices plummeted following the collapse of the International Tin Council in the mid-1980s. Malaysia shut 30 per cent of its tin mines and cut more than 5,000 jobs. “My father lost his job; he also lost a lot of money because he invested heavily in shares,” he recalls, adding that his family had to sell their home and move into a rented house. All luxuries were cut back so that his elder brother, then studying in



Mr Sam during his bartending days. He was inspired in part by many of the professionally successful regulars who frequented the pub and wanted to do something different with his life. PHOTO: COURTESY OF SAM WENG CHAM

Sydney, could remain in university. “I remember I had to stop piano lessons but I didn’t mind because it meant I no longer had to do scales,” he says, grinning. But giving up tennis and swimming, which he loved, and other enrichment classes made him resentful. It’s not something he is proud of but he started showing his resentment by being rebellious. “I wanted this and that but I couldn’t get them. Meanwhile, my friends had everything they wanted. I skipped school, got a girlfriend and really went against my mother. My dad was then working in a vegetable plantation in Perlis,” says the former student of Ipoh’s Anglo-Chinese School who scored straight As until his mid teens. “I remember leaving the exam hall to play football after scribbling something for my Malay paper. I feel so bad for having done this to my mother although she and I are the best of friends now,” says Mr Sam who just scraped through his O levels in 1993. He could only look on with envy when many of his friends left for Kuala Lumpur or overseas to further their studies. Asked why he didn’t repeat his exams, he sighs and shrugs his shoulders defeatedly. “I just didn’t think about it,” he says. He started working as a kitchen help in an ice-cream parlour, earning RM250 a month. “It was barely enough for me to buy cigarettes,” he says. Realising that even his belligerent friends were taking night courses to better themselves, he got himself a certificate in electrical works. “But it was useless.” His next job was a receptionist at Ipoh’s Syuen Hotel. His then girlfriend, who was working as a flight attendant, helped him with the fees for a diploma in hotel

Resilience led him to success

<http://str.sg/samwengcham>

SCAN TO WATCH

and catering management. But half-way through, he had to borrow money to complete his course. “It was the worst time of my life. I asked to become a night auditor so that I could attend classes during the day,” he says. “I attended classes from 9am to 5pm, and then from 6pm to 9pm before working from 11pm to 7am,” he says. After completing his diploma, he landed a management trainee job with the Penang Mutiara Resort, and was later promoted to assistant manager of its Italian restaurant. Then came a call from his brother in Sydney who asked if he was keen on managing the warehouse of his wife’s business importing and exporting foodstuff. The job sounded glamorous but Mr Sam found that he was nothing more than a “coolie” in Australia, loading, unloading and unpacking stuff. He went back to Ipoh after less than a year, and found a job as the retail manager of a phone shop. A friend working in Singapore called not long after, asking him if he was keen to be interviewed for the position of a restaurant supervisor in 1998. He remembers taking a nine-hour bus ride to Singapore and high-

DON’T GIVE UP

I had potential when I was young but I chose to squander it by being rebellious. It was only when I saw how my friends were doing that I started to buck up... Set realistic dreams and don’t give up on them. Just take small steps, keep improving yourself and one day, you will get there.

”

MR SAM WENG CHAM, who was once a wilful teen whose rebelliousness had made life difficult for his parents and himself, but who is now happy to have put his life back on track.

tailoring it home immediately after the interview. A few weeks later, he started work at The Great World Cafe Restaurant in Great World City along Kim Seng Road, drawing a monthly salary of \$1,500, \$350 of which went towards renting a room

he shared with his friend. Bad luck, however, continued to dog him. In less than a year, the restaurant filed for liquidation. Fortunately, the owner of The Blue Cow, a pub Mr Sam went to after work, offered him a job as a bar manager, one he gratefully accepted. He stayed with the pub for four years, and enrolled in his IT course after two years on the job. The decision was fuelled in part by many of the professionally successful regulars who frequented the pub. “They often bought rounds of drinks for their friends and they would pay without even looking at the bill. I knew how much drinks cost and I often asked myself why these people were so successful and why couldn’t I be like them?” The course was not easy for the self-confessed “computer idiot”. Finding a job in the tech industry after he completed it was even harder. “I sent out, really, 100 resumes but only one company replied,” he recalls. “I remember buying a pair of trousers for the interview so that I’d look presentable.” Ms Karen Chia, the marketing head of Chass Computer Consultants, gave him a set of brochures during the first interview and asked him to come back after two weeks to make a presentation. “She said it was to gauge my understanding. I didn’t really understand what I was reading so I memorised the brochures. She knew it, but offered me the job of partner alliance executive anyway,” he says. “She said knowledge could be acquired on the job; she liked my personality.” Although it was a steep learning curve, he made full use of the lucky break he was given. He did well forging strategic relationships with vendors and won a couple of awards. In his third year, a global IT company offered him a marketing job. He took it and in nine years, rose from account manager to regional sales director. To come to grips with financial forecasts and planning, he decided to study part-time for a business degree from the University of Canberra. In 2014, he left to join another company as regional alliance manager. By then, he was married to an HR executive. Barely one year later, just before his wife gave birth to the first of their two children, he was re-trenched. He decided the time had come for him to strike out on his own. Together with four former colleagues, he dug into his savings to set up Transcend Solutions with \$250,000. “That was almost all my savings. I was worried but also confident at the same time. I was 38, and told myself, if the worst happened, I could always come back into the workforce,” he says. It was a tough slog in the company’s early days. “When you’re a local start-up, suppliers won’t give you credit so we had to be extra careful with our cash flow. It was also hard to break through to companies because we were a small outfit.” To keep afloat, the company took on small servicing jobs which required no tender or purchase of expensive equipment. “Fortunately, the companies which engaged us liked our rich skill sets and the way we serviced them. Slowly, we became their vendors, and suppliers started giving us credit once they knew that we had a sizeable clientele,” says Mr Sam whose customers today comprise mostly multinationals like financial institutions and manufacturing companies. Turnover for Transcend’s first year was just \$1 million. However, this skyrocketed to more than \$10 million in the second year when they landed a project with a big logistics company to implement a global financial system and disaster recovery programme. Last year, sales for the company – which grew 423 per cent between 2014 and 2017, and which is in The Straits Times list of fastest-growing companies this year – was more than \$6 million. Transcend today employs 12 staff, has an office in Malaysia and is planning to expand into Indonesia soon. Mr Sam and his partners dream of taking the company public one day. Meanwhile, Mr Sam is happy he has been able to make good. “I had potential when I was young but I chose to squander it by being rebellious. It was only when I saw how my friends were doing that I started to buck up,” he says, adding that he has apologised to his mother for causing her grief. He hopes he can inspire young people by telling his story. “Set realistic dreams and don’t give up on them. Just take small steps, keep improving yourself and one day, you will get there.”

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Budget roundtable

Wish list: More help for older workers and mums

Two economists, one business chamber leader and a labour MP came together on Wednesday at The Straits Times-UOB Budget Roundtable to give their insights into the recent Budget.

During the hour-long discussion, moderated by ST associate editor Vikram Khanna, the four panellists touched on issues including challenges facing the Government's economic restructuring drive and social priorities that could be addressed further.

Here's what UOB economist Barnabas Gan, NTUC assistant secretary-general Patrick Tay, Singapore University of Social Sciences economist Walter Theseira and Singapore Business Federation chief executive Ho Meng Kit had to say.

No clear sign it's an election Budget

Adrian Lim
Political Correspondent

The generous slew of goodies announced by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat in last Monday's Budget has sparked talk about whether a general election could be held as early as later this year.

Among the measures are the Merdeka Generation Package, for which the Government will set aside \$6.1 billion to help nearly 500,000 Singaporeans born in the 1950s with their long-term healthcare costs, and a \$1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus with a focus on those on lower incomes.

But panellists at a Straits Times-UOB Budget Roundtable were unable to say if this was indeed an election Budget. The next election must be held by April 2021.

During the hour-long discussion on the Government's financial plans for the next fiscal year, panel moderator and ST associate editor Vikram Khanna asked the experts: "If you were to design an election Budget, would it look something like this (the 2019 Budget)?"

UOB economist Barnabas Gan said it is "50-50" that this was an election Budget.

Ensuring help and fairness for older workers

More can be done by employers to ensure older workers are retained and get fairly paid, experts said at the roundtable following Monday's Budget.

While the Budget rolled out initiatives to help the older generations, experts weighed in with their wish-list for mature workers.

Singapore University of Social Sciences economist Walter Theseira said there should be more flexibility in tailoring working conditions for those who are older.

He said: "I think the reality is, the type of work that people can do may change as they age. Perhaps the desire for how intensively they want to work may also change. They may not want to work at the same pace as before."

"And in order to be fair to work-



Noting that the earlier Pioneer Generation Package had a projected cost of \$9 billion, Mr Gan said the Merdeka Generation Package – estimated to cost more than \$8 billion over its beneficiaries' lifetimes – is a "generous" initiative.

The \$1.1 billion bonus shared with Singaporeans for the bicentennial – marking the 200 years since Stamford Raffles landed in Singapore in 1819 – also has a "nice ring" to it, Mr Gan noted.

But he said while a deficit of \$3.5 billion is projected for the 2019 financial year, the current term of Government has accumulated about \$19.1 billion of surplus in the first three years of administration.

There is still more the Government can do with the surplus, Mr Gan said.

Singapore Business Federation chief executive Ho Meng Kit said it did not feel like an election Budget,

pointing out: "If it was an election Budget, we kind of expect a little bit more giveaways, handouts... after all, they've got \$15 billion still stuffed in the reserves. So the powder is dry."

Mr Ho noted the Merdeka Generation Package had been talked about for some time. The package was first announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the 2018 National Day Rally.

Singapore University of Social Sciences economist Walter Theseira demurred to say whether it was an election Budget.

But he did say responsible governments should acquire the reputation for dealing fairly with the Budget based on the fiscal position and long-term spending needs.

They should try to design the same Budget year on year, without "pandering to the public, or pandering to try to get re-elected", Profes-

sor Theseira added. "And, by and large, I think this Government tries to do that the best it can."

In answer to Mr Khanna's question, Labour MP Patrick Tay drew attention to the Government's strategic measures in the Budget, saying: "I think the message is clear, not just this year, as well as the last couple of years – because of the various challenges we are facing as a country and what is happening out in the global economy, the things we are doing are strategic."

The NTUC assistant secretary-general added: "The narratives and the message have been very clear: we need to transform, we need to keep pace and, like I said, we don't just need to keep afloat, we need to keep ahead of the competition and to really stay ready, relevant and resilient."

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Panellists at last week's Straits Times-UOB Budget Roundtable were (from left) moderator Vikram Khanna, ST associate editor; Mr Ho Meng Kit, CEO of Singapore Business Federation; Mr Barnabas Gan, economist, UOB; Mr Patrick Tay, labour MP and NTUC assistant secretary-general; and Professor Walter Theseira from the Singapore University of Social Sciences. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

What's behind diesel tax increase?

The diesel tax increase from 10 cents per litre to 20 cents might be a way to correct an older policy on light passenger-use diesel vehicles that cause pollution in a dense city, said Singapore University of Social Sciences economist Walter Theseira at a roundtable last week to discuss the Budget statement.

"The only reason why we're going after diesel is it's been shown that diesel fuel usage has a lot of negative externalities, mostly because of the particulate matter, the nitrous oxide pollution," he said.

Some years ago, diesel was em-

braced and encouraged for passenger vehicles because it was seen as a good solution to carbon emissions, he added. "This move to increase diesel taxes is a way of trying to correct this policy issue that we and other governments made, perhaps (as) a mistake in the past."

While electric vehicles (EVs) might seem a better solution, there are no charging infrastructure standards yet that can support them for widespread passenger use, Professor Theseira noted.

"What we should do is start deploying EVs in controlled environments first for fleets where we can build the infrastructure and know that it'll be utilised," he said. For widespread passenger vehicle use, he suggested waiting for mass adoption in bigger markets where the charging infrastructure would be stable.

Sue-Ann Tan



Diesel-powered light passenger vehicles may not be appropriate for dense urban areas because of air pollution issues, says economist Walter Theseira. LIANHE ZAOBAO FILE PHOTO

Other ways to increase revenue

Government expenditure is projected to be higher by 1.6 per cent in the next fiscal year, and spending on healthcare is also expected to rise in the coming years because of an ageing population.

While a goods and services tax (GST) hike of 2 percentage points will take effect between 2021 and 2025, what other options does Singapore have, in terms of raising revenues?

Moderator Mr Khanna threw up possibilities such as wealth taxes, higher income taxes, estate duties and higher contributions from the Net Investment Returns Contribution.

UOB's Mr Gan said traditional revenue drivers – such as personal income tax and corporate tax – are very much dependent on the growth of the economy.

If the Singapore economy can repeat last year's 3.2 per cent growth, outpacing the lower forecasts, we could "potentially see higher corporate income tax and personal income tax revenues", Mr Gan said.

Though the GST will see a shift from 7 per cent to 9 per cent, the tax rate is still low compared with international standards, as Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat pointed out, Mr Gan said.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average is 19 per cent and, among Asia-Pacific countries, many have standard GST rates that exceed 9 per cent.

Mr Gan said increasing the GST to 9 per cent is about making the fiscal spending and future Budgets more sustainable.

Meanwhile, SBF's Mr Ho said Singapore should be focused on growth, and "not focused on redistribution of a mediocre economic performance".

Mr Ho said it is "underselling" Singapore to settle for just 2 per cent to 3 per cent of growth. Citing Mr Heng's vision for the Republic as "Asia 101", Mr Ho said Singapore can become a global Asia hub for innovation, technology and enterprise.

With good growth, there will be more to distribute at the next Budgets, Mr Ho added. "(We) don't have to worry about increasing corporate tax or wealth tax (and other measures)."

Adrian Lim

PANELLISTS' TAKE ON...

OTHER SOCIAL PRIORITIES

We cannot take our eye off the ball. Children from disadvantaged families don't pay anything out of pocket for their formal schooling but we have to look at the other disadvantages they face – access to the same kind of market-paid enrichment programmes and tuition as children of middle- and higher-income families.

Retirement adequacy – we could afford to look more seriously at whether we can provide some kind of minimum retirement benefit topped up by the Government.

So it's integration in Silver Support with the CPF scheme more formally. And how we build up CPF savings for lower- to middle-income workers, see whether we can give them more of a headstart in building up their savings.

”

SINGAPORE UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES ECONOMIST AND NOMINATED MP WALTER THESEIRA

INVESTING IN SKILLS UPGRADING, DESPITE NO TOP-UP TO THE SKILLSFUTURE PROGRAMME

The half-life of skills is five years, so gone are the days where you learn and you work and you retire. The new adage should be learn, work, learn, work, learn, work and then you retire.

So there are a lot of measures from the SkillsFuture perspective to encourage, that has to be really one key focus for the Government in many years to come.

”

LABOUR MP AND NTUC ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL PATRICK TAY

FUTURE GROWTH

We're underselling Singapore if we settle for just 2 to 3 per cent economic growth.

So Finance Minister (Heng Swee Keat) mentioned a very important vision – Singapore as the global Asia hub for innovation, technology and enterprise.

Second, if we are able to develop many more local companies into growth companies, they will offer good jobs and good potential for Singapore.

Third, growth in the region. Asean is still doing well, 5 to 6 per cent growth. China is still 6 per cent – not a small number. So plenty of opportunities.

”

SINGAPORE BUSINESS FEDERATION CHIEF EXECUTIVE HO MENG KIT

LOWER QUOTAS FOR FOREIGN WORKERS IN THE SERVICE INDUSTRY

The share of GDP of services to the overall GDP itself makes up almost 70 per cent.

So with the tightening of the DRC (Dependency Ratio Ceiling) for the service sector, there are only two things firms could do. Either scale down or increase cost to attract more local employees. And that pushes up the cost of services in general.

And if we just look at the inflation basket, a good part is being made up by food and also recreation. There's inflation risk in the coming years once the DRC is reduced from 40 per cent to 38 per cent and subsequently to 35 per cent.

”

UOB ECONOMIST BARNABAS GAN

THE STRAITS TIMES
ROUNDTABLE ON
Budget 2019
BROUGHT TO YOU BY
UOB

Enabling mums to get back to work

Mothers who quit their jobs after giving birth but whose children are now older should be given more opportunities to return to the workforce, said experts.

Their participation in the workforce – together with that of older workers – could potentially increase labour supply and boost economic growth, UOB's Mr Gan noted.

SBF's Mr Ho said the participation rate in the workforce for women past their childbearing age is "not as high", although many want to return to employment. The lack of relevant skills and the issue of reintegration might be challenges, he said.

He added: "Maybe more flexible arrangement (can be) provided by employers. I think it's going to be a

boost for employers and it's going to be a boost for (addressing) inequality in terms of the income side."

NTUC's Mr Tay noted that the female labour force participation rate had gone up in the last five years, but agreed that more flexible work arrangements could help women to balance coming back to the workforce with looking after the family.

However, he added that another

issue is the time they spent away from work. "They may have lost touch... a lot of things may have developed and changed. Even the methodology, the work, the job may not be there. Some of the jobs (may) have disappeared and new jobs are in. So how can we make sure that they get the new skills and are trained to fill these new jobs?"

Sue-Ann Tan



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What's Trending

Savouring Lorenzo's growth, slice by pizza slice

Mum's posts charting her son's monthly progress sparks debate about 'sharenting'



Nilanjana Sengupta

He doesn't know it yet, but one-year-old Lorenzo from Frederick, Maryland, is already a star.

Last week, on his first birthday, his photographer-mum posted a compilation of food-themed photos that marked Lorenzo's milestones as he grew from a month old to 12 months.

Milestone or monthly baby photos are not new, but what has helped this one go viral is the use of pizza slices to show Lorenzo's progress – from a single slice to a whole pizza.

So Lorenzo is now known as the pizza baby.

"We celebrated Lorenzo's first birthday just a few days ago and I am so excited to finally unveil the final monthly photo project we worked on for a year.

"It was definitely a labour of love but hey, I didn't have to think of what to have for dinner once a month!" wrote his mother Dani Leigh Giannandrea, 34, on her blog.

The 12-photo collage has been shared almost 2,000 times and has 1,900 likes on Facebook.

And Giannandrea has received more than 800 comments from friends and acquaintances as well as people she doesn't even know.

Why pizza?

"His grandma said that I have to do something as an ode to his name and his Italian heritage, and I totally agreed," Giannandrea was quoted as saying by Good Morning America in an interview.

She had tried to do a similar project using a vintage suitcase for her older son, who is now three, but abandoned it mid-way.

Parents are usually divided about "sharenting" – the use of social media to share content based on their children. Some don't share at all, citing privacy or articles on Internet crimes targeting children.

Some children themselves shy away from their parents following their every move with a camera. A friend's son is always worried his mother will post an embarrassing photo of him online, which she thinks as cute. When he notices her taking out her phone, he turns around so that she sees his back, or hides behind a chair till she promises she will only share it with family and friends.

Those who share are creating their child's digital persona online before the child is even aware of what it may mean. Some parents start sharing right at the very beginning, with the sonogram photos, according to a survey by



Collage of 12 photos showing Lorenzo's progress using pizza slices that his mother shared on her Facebook page. PHOTOS: DANI LEIGH

Photographer Dani Leigh Giannandrea with her husband Frank Giannandrea and their children Charlie and Lorenzo.

ONLY ONLINE

The week's top 3 picks at straitstimes.com



VIDEO: Athletes of the year

Check out the winners and their reactions at The Straits Times Athlete of the Year awards. str.sg/STaoty

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VIDEO: Hangout with ST

Topics include the late Karl Lagerfeld, who had some memorable quips, and how SingPost can improve its services. str.sg/hangout52



Internet security company AVG. Some have dedicated hashtags for the kids, which they can follow when they are older.

Sharenting is something some parents usually do for themselves, or because they want to be part of the motherhood conversation, or they want to share their child's accomplishments with their friends or family who live far away.

However, every now and then, there is some news that makes one think twice about sharing children's photos online.

A recent article in The Atlantic quoted teenagers who described how they felt when they discovered their parents have been uploading their photos, swim scores, essays and poems online for years: Some felt uncomfortable and had a chat with their parent, while a couple were thrilled to find they can search themselves on Google.

Giannandrea said she has been thinking about this since her photo project went viral and "everyone has seen my sweet little Enzo".

Currently she posts mostly on

holidays or milestones for her kids.

She also has a private account for family and close friends, where she posts photos of some of her children's candid moments.

"I do think that there will come a time, probably age four or five, when I will stop posting my children on social media," she told The Sunday Times over e-mail.

"I do worry about invading their privacy and just the nature of social media in general – how will it affect my children's future? Will it be used to bully them or affect their jobs – that is definitely something I worry about," she added.

Till then, cute antics of kids will always be a draw for heart-shaped likes and aww comments online.

A TASTE FOR SOAP

She wets the soap and then slurps up the lather. "Enak Banget (delicious)," she says.

Khosik Assyifa's Instagram account @khosikmubarak has videos of her reviewing different types of soaps based on their taste.

They have garnered thousands of views and comments, some of

them giving suggestions on what other soaps she could try.

She has tasted Lux, Lifebuoy, Giv – and proclaimed all of them tasty.

According to rachfeed.com, Khosik, who is from Indonesia's East Java province, said she developed a taste for soaps when she was pregnant with her daughter two years ago.

But going by her Instagram account, the 21-year-old only started posting her rather unusual reviews earlier this month.

It seems she was embarrassed about sharing this weird habit of hers – but no longer.

Eating non-nutritive substances like soap, paint, glue, dirt is referred

to as pica behaviour.

Well, it is not for everyone.

Once bit a soap when I was a toddler and I still remember the shock of the taste.

But it is just the sort of thing that could turn into an Internet challenge.

Last year, around this time, the Tide pod challenge went viral, when some people began biting into colourful pods of the laundry detergent, only to spit out the substance almost immediately.

Given the interest Khosik's videos have generated, will tasting soap turn into a trend too?

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NOTABLE TRENDS

JUSSIE SMOLLETT: The American actor has surrendered after police said he staged a racist assault against himself. Smollett denies the accusation.

A-LEVEL RESULTS 2019: Students who sat the GCE A-level examination last year achieved the best passing rate since the curriculum was revised in 2006.

TOTO: Two lucky punters in Yishun won about \$13.6 million in the Toto Hongbao draw on Friday.

#OpinionOfTheDay

No thanks, Google Calendar, I'm holding on to my paper diary



Yuen Sin

As I edged into my third year as a working adult last year, I realised that I was gradually losing track of things that were happening in my life.

Friends' birthdays were remembered only at the last minute. I would forget to call work contacts.

Though I ran through a mental to-do list every morning, I would be distracted by new tasks that emerged. As a result, projects and tasks went undone, sometimes for weeks or months on end.

That sparked a period of self-reflection: Where had I gone wrong? After all, when I was in school, I had been a pretty organised student.

It struck me as ironic that I was losing it just as various technological tools, ranging from Google Calendar to the Notes app on most phones, were now freely at my disposal.

Determined to find a solution one Saturday morning, I visited an Artbox stationery store at Ang Mo Kio Hub and picked out a lightweight, pastel-hued diary, filled with blank spaces and sections for every day, week and month.

It was a comforting reminder of the diaries I used to buy at the start of every school year from secondary school onwards, though I grew out of the habit by the time I finished university.

As I began to use my diary regularly, I soon realised they are far superior to the two-dimensional screens of phone or browser apps.

For a start, no strikethrough feature on your phone or computer can beat the sheer satisfaction of crossing out completed projects in your diary with a pen.

A diary can look intimidatingly empty in January, when one has no idea what difficult tasks might land

on its blank pages.

In school, we used to adorn these pages with events to look forward to, such as school holidays, celebrations like Chinese New Year or sports day and, of course, the end of major examinations.

The same could be done now by penning in an upcoming family holiday, or a weekend reunion with friends.

I send so many texts, e-mails and messages on my phone a day that they no longer register in my memory.

At any one second, there could be multiple apps, messages and pop-ups all vying for my attention. But when I take the effort to write things down, I remember the tasks a lot better – and that is backed by numerous research studies.

I find that when a bout of anxiety assails me over a looming event, flipping back through my diary and looking at all the trying times I have weathered gives me a sense of perspective.

I realise then that however tough a situation may seem, it too shall pass.

The nostalgic factor of using good old-fashioned analogue planners appeals too, since paper diaries have over the years become important symbols for my schoolmates and me.

The first flush of friendship with a new classmate arrived when she asked you for your birth date before she carefully marked it down with a felt marker in her diary – a promise to you that your special day would be remembered.

And during classes, we quietly rebelled against boredom by leaving doodles, messages and stickers in each other's diaries.

So I associate the simple act of writing in a diary with good memories, which in turn conjures optimistic feelings even when I am stressed.

It seems like I am not alone in this.

Millennials are, surprisingly, bucking digital trends to embrace paper products and stationery, resulting in brands like Moleskine – maker of designer notebooks – seeing revenues double from 2010 to 2015.

Of late, an even more advanced method called bullet journaling has taken off. Instead of using an organiser with a fixed layout, you customise a blank book with the help of markers, drawings or cut-outs.

"In the crazy digital world, journaling allows us to explore our minds in a creative manner," said a 27-year-old friend who picked up bullet journaling recently. "Doing

this feels like going back to basics," she added.

In an interview with Vox.com, Dr Perpetua Neo, a London-based clinical psychologist, suggested that millennials' need to organise minute tasks such as errands or social events may come from a craving for control, which drives shopping habits for products like physical planners.

This could be due to a lack of control they feel in the face of uncertain economic conditions, she added.

Those points resonated with me. Young people do share the same anxieties about the future and the changing nature of work in an increasingly disrupted world, and are looking for ways to assuage these fears in our everyday life.

The simple act of putting pen to paper has helped me feel less overwhelmed and become more organised.

Though life can feel too fast-paced at times, returning to slower, simpler methods can help us make better sense of it all.

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• #OpinionOfTheDay is a column for younger writers in the newsletter to write about issues that matter to them and their peers



Dr Martin Herrenknecht is the founder and chief executive of the eponymous engineering group that has emerged as the world's largest builder of tunnelling equipment. Last year, Herrenknecht recorded a turnover of €1.4 billion (\$\$2.1 billion), the combined output of 5,500 staff. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

InGoodCompany

Herrenknecht – that German mole in S’pore

The famed tunneller who turned down Elon Musk, on the challenges and thrills of his craft, including building S’pore’s deep sewer system



Ravi Velloor

Associate Editor

Had Dr Martin Herrenknecht been the older of his parents’ two sons, he’d have been the one running the little upholstery shop in the picturesque Rhineland town of Allmannsweiler in Germany.

Instead, that responsibility fell to his brother Dieter, who, in the tradition of the people who populate the Black Forest, inherited the family business. Martin was sent to university, where he studied engineering.

“My ambition was to hire more people than my father, who had 12 employees,” says Dr Herrenknecht, founder and chief executive of the eponymous engineering group that has emerged as the world’s largest builder of tunnelling equipment, operating around the world, including in Singapore, where it is executing deep tunnelling contracts for transport firm SMRT and national water agency PUB.

“My dream, when I decided to be active in the tunnel boring business, was to have 24 people working for me.”

Last year, Herrenknecht recorded a turnover of €1.4 billion (\$\$2.1 billion), the combined output of 5,500 staff. When Dr Herrenknecht started his company in 1975, the population of Allmannsweiler, he tells me, was 1,100 people.

Today, Herrenknecht hires 2,200 people in Allmannsweiler alone, and his machines, which seem to grow in size every half-decade, dot the landscape like giant moles basking in the sun as they await shipping out.

Armed with an engineering

degree that he earned in 1964, Dr Herrenknecht’s first job took him to next-door Switzerland, where he spent four years as a design engineer for road building machinery, his first exposure to living overseas.

He then went off to Canada and the United States to improve his English after failing to master French and English, lessons he found so boring that he often found himself shooting his lady teacher with snails.

In later years, he would pay a price for this inattention, once doling out an extra million francs for a contract he negotiated in France. “I went *oui* (“yes” in French), *oui, oui...* without fully knowing what was going on,” he laughs.

After doing small jobs back home between 1968 and 1970, he found himself back in Switzerland, working on American Memo excavator machines for what then was the longest road tunnel project in central Switzerland, the Seelberg Tunnel.

For five years, he toiled on the project, encountering challenges in hydraulics and other areas. Confident of his expanding skills, he decided to set up his own company.

“Without referrals, the most difficult job was to sell the first tunnel boring machine,” recalls Dr Herrenknecht, now 76 years old.

“It took me a year to sell my first machine, and the customer was a company called GKN. We had a job site in Luxembourg with difficult ground conditions and we had to blast. We overcame that situation and the company began to grow bigger and bigger.”

In 1980, after having first manufactured his machines in Switzerland, he opened the factory in his home town. The breakthrough came with a machine Herrenknecht developed that could work on mixed slurry and hard rock and also cope with a phenomenon known as excess pore pressure – an increase in the natural pore pressure in soil during boring of large-diameter tunnels that can affect tunnel cover stability.

By the end of the decade, Herrenknecht had an office in Singapore to cater to rising demand for its equipment from an Asia speeding to fix its infrastructure.

Slowly, the machines got bigger in diameter. By 1996, boring machines of 6m diameter were in production. From there, it was a

Fast facts

THE CEO

Dr Martin Herrenknecht is the founder and chief executive of Herrenknecht. He is 76 years old.

Son of an upholsterer in Schwana, Baden-Württemberg, Germany, Dr Herrenknecht graduated from Max Planck Gymnasium and studied at the University of Konstanz, earning an engineering degree in 1964.

He is a member of the Christian Democratic Union.

Dr Herrenknecht received the Werner von Siemens Ring in 2015 and the Diesel Medal the following year.

He is married to Colombia-born Paulina Ariza-Suarez. Herrenknecht. They have a son and two daughters.

leap to machines of 14.2m diameter.

An architect has the whole building to showcase his work to the world, the painter his canvas enhanced by lighting. A rock guitarist has a range of multimedia. How does an engineer boring a passage in the bowels of the earth show off his skills?

“When you make the longest railway tunnel and are the first to pass through it, that is an impressive portrait,” says Dr Herrenknecht, referring to the Gotthard Base Tunnel, the 57km passage that runs through the Swiss Alps and opened for service in December 2016. “When you lay a road tunnel across the Bosphorus and 120m above you in the water you see the (keel of the) big boats... that is a thrill.

Likewise, the Deep Tunnel Sewerage System Herrenknecht is helping to create in Singapore brings special satisfaction.

“It is the cleanest project we have here – on one side, we collect garbage, then the garbage is burned to make electricity, and we also handle the treatment plant for the sewage, which is ultimately recycled to produce water for yards and trees.”

Despite his advancing years, Dr Herrenknecht, who displays the energy of a man two decades younger, says he spends considerable time visiting project sites around the world.

About 40 per cent of tunnelling work is about the challenges of the underground terrain, he says. The rest is divided equally between having the best machines and men for the job.

“In a tunnel, you always get surprises,” he adds. “It is not an easy job like building skyscrapers,

THE COMPANY

Herrenknecht is the parent company of around 80 subsidiaries and associated companies in Germany and abroad that deal with tunnel construction and equipment.

It makes hard rock and tunnel boring machines, cutter tools, and control and navigations systems.

The fields of activity are divided into two traditional business units, traffic and utility tunnelling, as well as the business areas of exploration, mining and group brands.

The group has some 5,500 employees. It had a turnover of €1.4 billion (\$\$2.1 billion) last year.

SATISFYING PROJECT

It is the cleanest project we have here – on one side, we collect garbage, then the garbage is burned to make electricity, and we also handle the treatment plant for the sewage, which is ultimately recycled to produce water for yards and trees.



DR MARTIN HERRENKNECHT, founder of Herrenknecht, on the Deep Tunnel Sewerage System his company is helping to create in Singapore.

MEETING AN INTRIGUING PERSONALITY

Fascinating guy... sometimes, looking for solutions that lie a thousand years ahead... I have a feeling he is better in cars and rockets than in tunnelling.



DR HERRENKNECHT, on Tesla founder Elon Musk, some of whose ideas he found he could not agree to.

where you build the first floor and then start going up. In the Singapore sewer system, for instance, we encounter both hard rock and soft ground. If you don’t handle it right, the project goes kaput.”

I am curious to learn what Singapore is like below ground, and it turns out the geology is not far different from the mosaic that is Singapore society.

“If you get down deep, you have really hard rock, like a base. That is filled up with soft ground. We have Bukit Timah granite in central Singapore, the Jurong Formation in the west, alluvium in the east... Singapore is a mix.”

Herrenknecht is mentioned as a firm that once turned down Mr Elon Musk, and I am curious to know the details of its encounter with the visionary founder of Tesla, SpaceX and PayPal.

Dr Herrenknecht describes Mr Musk as a “fascinating guy... sometimes, looking for solutions that lie a thousand years ahead” but often without consideration for the geographical profile.

Two Herrenknecht engineers sat down with Mr Musk for more than 3½ hours and came away intrigued by the personality.

“Musk has five children, so everything he does, he divides or multiplies by five,” jokes Dr Herrenknecht. “If you offer a machine for €10 million, he only wants to pay €2 million. If you give him performance by hour, or day, he divides by five. My people were quite fascinated.”

But, he says, Mr Musk had ideas to which he could not agree. He wanted shafts in the city into which cars on platforms could be lowered, then the platform moves underground and lifts the car back again at its destination. It was all a bit too complicated.

“I have a feeling he is better in cars and rockets than in tunnelling,” says Dr Herrenknecht.

What lies ahead in his business? Tunnels are getting bigger, and so, too, are the machines that build them. Already, he says, boring machines of 17.6m in diameter are standard in Hong Kong. Bigger cities are building multifunctional, double-deck tunnels. The Eurasia tunnel in the Bosphorus created by a 14.2m-diameter Herrenknecht machine has two decks for traffic flowing each way. Kuala Lumpur’s Smart Tunnel built by a Gamuda-led consortium is designed to double as a storm drain as well.

Compared with the traffic that the tunnels carry, the tunnelling progress can be glacial. The cutterhead of the massive 14.2m-diameter Herrenknecht Maxishield that was deployed in a Moscow project, for instance, turns

at 1.5 revolutions per minute. After the cutterhead has done its work, a smaller machine inside that rotates at about 2.2 turns per minute evacuates the slurry through the massive machine’s belly, even as it inches forward. This is one helluva giant mole at work. Dr Herrenknecht sees future tunnel boring machines having a diameter of 20m as tunnellers are called upon to provide for a variety of uses.

He rates Singapore as among the most forward-thinking cities of the world in the way it has comprehensively planned for its road, subway, sewage and water supply using the underground route. Shanghai is doing well too, as are the West Asian cities of Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Dubai. With Asia’s massive thirst for infrastructure, contracts are aplenty, but so is the competition. Increasingly, Japanese and Chinese companies also offer similar services.

I ask what he thinks of the biggest infrastructure project in history, China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Dr Herrenknecht says Europe has to watch this carefully, and not shy away from participating. But while the Chinese want to supply both financing and labour, they should employ more locals, thus raising skill sets in the participating nations. In his own factory’s building academy, he says, dozens of engineers from overseas have received training.

One thing that will not happen is a sale of Herrenknecht to China. While many of its competitors have been bought up by Chinese interests seeking their technology, Herrenknecht will remain a family-owned firm. Dr Herrenknecht’s son Martin-Devid is increasingly involved in all the big decisions of the firm. His two daughters – one a designer in New York and the other a stewardess with Lufthansa now taking a break after giving birth – are not involved in the business. His Colombian-born wife Paulina, whom he married in 1982, has come to love the German way of life after initial settling-in pangs.

The Herrenknecht firm supports the German javelin Olympics team, which has produced a gold medal winner. At the moment, there are four men in training. Separately, it also backs a young woman aspirant for the 100m sprint.

“The trainer of the Olympics team also trains me. That helps me perfect my technique,” Dr Herrenknecht says. “It keeps me young. Next week, when I am back in Germany I have to run and bike for two hours to shed the weight I gained in Asia.”

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The Guillemard Road Fatty Weng, located in a shophouse in that area. The stall remained a popular after-hours hang-out until it was reclaimed by the landlord in 2014. PHOTO: COURTESY OF FATTY WENG



Fatty Weng Restaurant at Singapore Badminton Hall in the early 1990s. With its seating capacity of 800, it became the venue for Chinese weddings in the 1980s. PHOTO: COURTESY OF FATTY WENG

The story of Lai Foo Weng and his Fatty Weng restaurant

This is an excerpt from the book *Delicious Heirlooms* by Ow Kim Kit. The book features the stories of 10 family-run restaurants. It is available at leading bookstores for \$32.10 (inclusive of GST).

Geylang is filled with many things exotic, and we are no longer talking about the streetwalkers. Singapore's once infamous red light and gambling district is a foodies' paradise. Along one lorong is the must-eat frog leg porridge and round the corner, the turtle soup... We could go on.

Derek Lai and I both spent our formative years here in Geylang, as primary school kids. I entered Maha Bodhi School in 1981 when it was located on Lorong 34 Geylang, while Derek studied at Kong Hwa Primary School right across on Guillemard Road. Speaking to him brought back a flood of memories. We used to dash across the roads, fish in drains, suck nectar (at least I was told it was nectar) from orange ixora flowers and get caught for doing all that.

Yes, we have seen much in this part of town, goings-on that children are not supposed to see.

Derek, five years younger, would have encountered more as the second-generation owner of Fatty Weng Restaurant, an establishment of the Geylang-Guillemard area for decades.

For Geylang residents in the early 1970s till 2014, the humble Fatty Weng and its affiliated Fatty Weng Restaurant in the old Singapore Badminton Hall were the venues for celebrating a special occasion or two. Derek apologised that his father Lai Foo Weng would not be joining us for our interview. "That's okay," I said, containing my disappointment. "I am sure I will get to meet him next time."

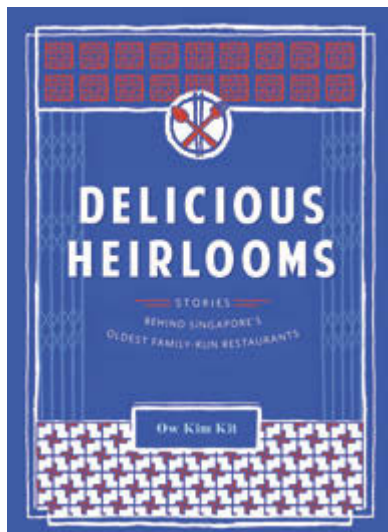
Derek told me that the once tireless 75-year-old Lai found it extremely difficult initially to accept that he has slowed down due to old age. "He has always been temperamental," Derek said. "If he was here, he will be able to tell you a lot more about our restaurants' history. But he will say one thing and then suddenly skip to something else... not easy to keep up!"

Born in 1942 in the mining town of Ipoh in what is now Malaysia, Lai moved to Singapore when he was 16. This little red dot was still part of what was then Malaya and many from the north were crossing over in search of a different life.

Lai began his career as a kitchen boy, working dawn to dusk for three years in a zi char shop in Chinatown. It was time well used: Lai would observe with much interest how the cooks whipped up popular Cantonese-style dishes that were fast, economical and, more importantly, delicious.

As part of his employment arrangement, Lai lived in the shop and learnt how his boss and fellow helpers ran a food establishment. "He told us that his dream was to open his own restaurant, but life was very precarious then," Derek said. But by the late 1960s, "he felt he really needed to believe in himself and his cooking ability."

In 1967, Lai introduced his first stall at the Bencoolen Road and Bugis Street junction on Albert Street, known to Singapore Chinese as "Ah Ba Guay". He named the stall Fatty Weng in Cantonese. The name was a natural as Lai was plump and Weng is his given name. "There were many good eateries in that area," Derek recounted. "One



The book, a Straits Times Press publication, features family food businesses that are at least 50 years old this year. PHOTO: ST PRESS

very famous shop that was there for a long time was Weng Seong Fatty, which has moved to Burlington Square. People always ask if we are related, but we are not."

Starting a food business in those days required no official licence and was relatively simple. Fatty Weng was a mere make-shift set-up put together from planks of wood, sundry stools and a lot of self-belief. Needless to say, Lai began by cooking and serving the very same Cantonese favourites that he had memorised from his previous workplace such as sweet and sour pork and stir-fried beef hor fun.

The Albert Street and Bugis Street quarter was frequented by foreign sailors on their R&R who packed the eateries and pubs in rowdy inebriation and made out in dark alleys with local transvestites. Violence and lawlessness were nightly afflictions. Fatty Weng was not spared. Hence, in the early 1970s, Lai, as a formal start for his business, registered Fatty Weng with the authorities and moved to a coffee shop on Guillemard Road.

Fatty Weng settled in nicely over the next four decades. As a mark of his success, Lai in 1974 bought his own home in Tanjong Katong where he still lives. "Our whole family basically grew up there," Derek said.

"But how was Geylang in that era any less boisterous or sleazy than Bugis Street?" I wondered.

Derek acknowledged that it wasn't. Geylang moreover had illegal gambling dens and secret societies. "There were desperate gamblers who would pawn their watches or jewellery to my father," Derek recalled. "Eh, Pui Kia, this one sell to you for 30 or 50 dollars, okay?" they would ask of Lai. Hoodlums would eat without paying and extort Lai for "protection fees" as an insurance against gangland trouble.

For the most part, however, "my father was somehow respected by the 'black and the white' characters," Derek said proudly. Lai was also fortunate to have actual protection from the policemen who patronised his stall. It was an interesting time, to say the least.

Lai himself resisted the vices surrounding him. He did not drink in excess, gamble or womanise. Derek joked: "He was probably too stingy and always dressed down in T-shirt, shorts and slippers, so nobody gave him a second look."

He enjoyed a booming business,



Lai Foo Weng, the founder of Fatty Weng Restaurant, with his son Derek in their Smith Street shop. Derek manages most of the operations, which he has updated to include technology for reservations and delivery. PHOTO: TED CHEN

especially at night, when businessmen would bring club hostesses and order extravagantly to impress.

What were some of the dishes? Lai's signature is the Deep Fried Soon Hock, which had, in fact, originated as an experiment. Derek explained that the marble goby — "soon hock" — is a premium freshwater fish that is "heavily sought after for its sweet, delicate flavour and smooth texture".

In the 1970s and 1980s, live seafood was very costly and what Lai could afford did not have the freshness of the "live" variety. He therefore came up with the idea to deep fry the fish and then drizzle over it a special oyster sauce concoction that consists of soya sauce, fragrant hot garlic oil, julienned ginger, garlic, Chinese parsley and spring onion.

The customers took enthusiastically to the crispy skin and tender flesh. "People were not so health-conscious then and liked deep-fried food," said Derek. Indeed, the menu of Fatty Weng was customised for the Singapore palate: strong in flavours and heavy on oil and spices. Derek lamented that contemporary diners prefer the boring less-oil, less-salt options and he has no choice but to oblige.

Be that as it may, patrons still love having their beer and brandy with Fatty Weng's claypot pig liver and honey pork ribs.



Fatty Weng's signature Deep Fried Soon Hock. The marble goby — "soon hock" — is "heavily sought after for its sweet, delicate flavour". PHOTO: TED CHEN

"These are not exactly unique dishes, but my father refined traditional recipes with good-quality ingredients and experimented with different preparations," Derek said.

An example is the Fatty Weng deep-fried chicken skin pieces, for which the meat of a skinned chicken is minced and marinated in assorted ingredients and then re-assembled with the skin before being deep-fried. A sweet soya sauce is the finishing touch. Such is the meticulous care Lai proudly lavished on his culinary creations.

The stall remained a popular after-hours hang-out until it was reclaimed by the landlord in 2014. But Lai had his Fatty Weng Restaurant too. It was his first air-conditioned restaurant, opened in 1979 beside Hollywood Theatre on the ground floor of Lion City Hotel downstairs from the equally old-school Happy Restaurant. Sadly, "We didn't do well and closed after three years," said Derek.

Lai's early forays never did go smoothly. He took his restaurant to Geylang East Industrial Park in 1982, but the hinterland failed to bring in a steady crowd. After another three years, the restaurant again folded.

In 1986, when the newly built Singapore Badminton Hall opened on Guillemard Road, Lai had a gut feel that he had found an ideal location to perhaps replicate his success with the coffee shop stall in a large-scale setting. He was not wrong. Fatty Weng Restaurant with its seating capacity of 800 became the banquet hall for Chinese weddings in the 1980s and his career picked up.

other three years, the restaurant again folded.

In 1986, when the newly built Singapore Badminton Hall opened on Guillemard Road, Lai had a gut feel that he had found an ideal location to perhaps replicate his success with the coffee shop stall in a large-scale setting. He was not wrong. Fatty Weng Restaurant with its seating capacity of 800 became the banquet hall for Chinese weddings in the 1980s and his career picked up.

"It was quite touching when some of these elderly couples who had their weddings in our restaurant brought their old photos to show us recently and insisted on celebrating their anniversaries here," said Derek.

Then came SARS, in 2003. Just like during the 1997 financial crisis, the family had to dig into their savings to survive, but Derek was quick to comment that those setbacks were nowhere as damaging to the F&B business as modern-day corporatisation and international chain restaurants.

"Foreign cuisine, especially Japanese and Korean, is increasingly popular. The younger generation are moreover opting to have their weddings in glamorous hotels." He fretted that "things are very, very challenging".

Said Derek: "My mum used to help out in the shops, but was at the same time expected to raise our big family of seven. My father's odd hours also kept him very busy, spending 18 hours a day away from home."

Lai gave his life to the business, shuttling between the coffee shop stall and the restaurant, always leading by example by rolling up his sleeves to personally chop or cook when things got busy. Derek admitted that he did not communicate well with Lai until he was much older. "Only after I was 30 did I begin to have meaningful conversations with my father. My wife Ruth tells me it's because we boys mature slow!"

Derek is the youngest among five girls and two boys. The sisters were never directly involved in business. Brother Kelvin was in charge of the coffee shop stall, leaving the Badminton Hall outlet to Derek, who came on full-time in 2003 at the age of 23.

He started as a prep cook and even today, he spends at least two to three days a week in the kitchen, learning from his father's long-serving chefs. He said it is critical to be hands-on in this business. That way, he will always know how the supplies are being managed and can minimise wastage. "My father was not coming to the restaurant much as he was already quite old."

Three years later, in 2005, a veteran chef resigned and Derek took over. Derek was young and energetic; the work was, to him, a hobby rather than a chore. He assured Lai that he would not change their traditional recipes, but nor would he pass up on any opportunity to innovate with his chefs.

"We often had arguments, but they are usually resolved smoothly because the decision-making is between my father and me. Many others in this business have meddling family members or lawsuits. I have only my father, and that is problematic enough," Derek chuckled.

In 2007, the MRT Circle Line started construction in the Guillemard area. The family relocated to their current premises on Smith Street, although, as it turned out, the Singapore Badminton Hall building was eventually unaffected by the roadworks.

Smith Street in the heart of Chinatown is a historic neighbourhood that has been transformed into a tourist magnet with squeaky-clean hawkers stalls and shops peddling cheap cheongsams and Merlion souvenirs.

Fatty Weng Restaurant's new incarnation on Smith Street was as a joint venture with Da Dong dim sum institution of Mosque Street: Lai was the largest shareholder.

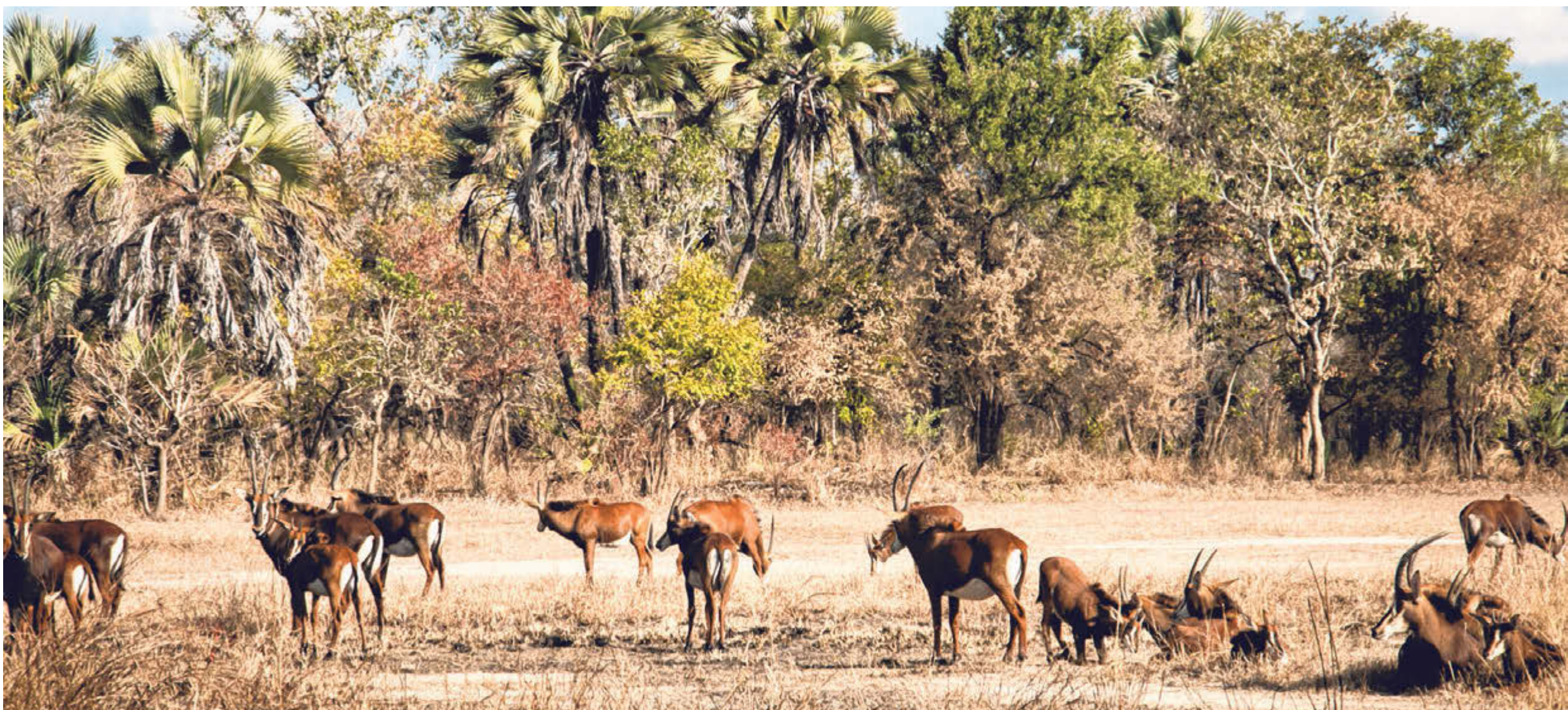
But while the rebranded "Da Dong by Fatty Weng Restaurant" remained popular for Fatty Weng's signature dishes, loyalists regretted that it had lost its traditional focus on comfort food.

In 2013, the whole of Smith Street was closed for a nine-month urban renewal. It was during this hiatus that Derek convinced Lai to restore Fatty Weng Restaurant to its name as well as its homeliness.

Not that Derek needs anyone's permission because Derek is today the boss. Lai has stepped away due to old age.

In 2014, the Guillemard Road shop ceased, and older brother Kelvin has left the F&B trade and gone abroad. Derek is the one managing most of the restaurant operations, which he has updated to include technology for POS (point-of-sale), online reservations and delivery systems, while Ruth handles the HR and administration. The couple have three boys aged 12, 10 and four.

"You must have gotten married in your restaurant?" I said. "Er, no, our wedding was at Chijmes!" Derek laughed. "Nicer setting."



Gorongosa National Park is a rare success story – a case study in nature’s renewal and proof that with adequate funding and committed leadership, conservation is possible in even the poorest corners of the world. PHOTO: ISTOCK

A COMEBACK FOR AFRICAN NATIONAL PARKS

As wildlife authorities on the continent work with non-profit organisations to secure ecologically valuable landscapes, populations of large mammals have grown.

Patrick Adams

The earth’s sixth mass extinction, scientists warn, is now well under way.

Worldwide, wildlife populations are plummeting at astonishing rates, and the trend is perhaps most starkly evident in Africa’s protected areas – the parks, game reserves and sanctuaries home to many of the world’s most charismatic species.

Between 1970 and 2005, national parks in Africa saw an average decline of 59 per cent in the populations of dozens of large mammals, among them lions, zebras, elephants and giraffes. In at least a dozen parks, the losses exceeded 85 per cent.

One of those was Gorongosa National Park, an area roughly the size of Rhode Island, in central Mozambique.

Once a premier safari destination, Gorongosa suffered through a brutal 16-year civil war. When the fighting finally ended in 1992, the park was a shambles: More than 95 per cent of its large mammals had been wiped out – slaughtered for food and the purchase of arms. Abandoned for another decade, it might well have gone the way of so many other protected areas: downgraded and downsized, converted to cropland or opened to mining.

But now the numbers tell a different story, and it is one with lessons for the world.

In Gorongosa, African wildlife is making a comeback. On a visit last autumn, I saw vast herds of antelope, lion prides lazing in the shade, pods of hippos, a pangolin, a fish eagle weighed down with a fresh catch and families of elephants lumbering through a forest of fever trees. And much more.

Last October, researchers in the park counted more than 100,000 large mammals, an increase of more than 700 per cent over figures from a decade ago. And with that resurgence, Gorongosa has emerged as a rare success story – a case study in nature’s renewal and proof that with adequate funding and committed leadership, conservation is possible in even the poorest corners of the world.

To be sure, Gorongosa is a special case. Since 2004, American philanthropist Gregory Carr has spent tens of millions of dollars on the park and in the buffer zone that surrounds it, some 3,367sq km that are home to

an estimated 200,000 people.

Few protected areas in Africa enjoy anything close to that kind of support. Reliant on paltry tax revenues in countries with pressing social needs, most struggle to cover their basic operating costs. And while African countries have some of the world’s largest tracts of land under protection, many have languished for lack of funding. According to research by Dr Peter Lindsey and colleagues at the Wildlife Conservation Network, roughly 90 per cent of protected areas within lion range face severe budget shortfalls. Some, known as “paper parks”, serve as little more than lines on a map.

Dr Craig Packer, a veteran lion researcher at the University of Minnesota, said: “The assumption has long been that African wildlife will ‘pay its own way’, primarily through activities like photo-tourism and trophy hunting.

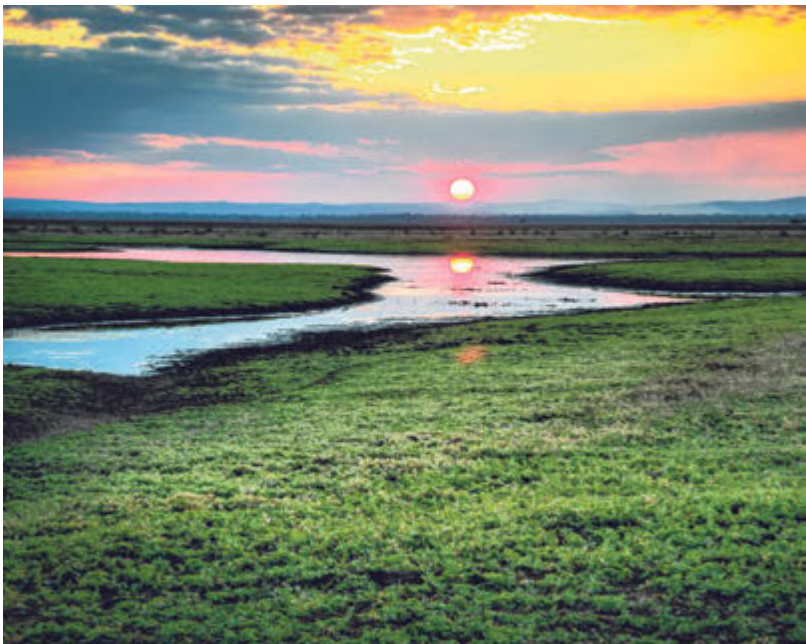
“Well, I can tell you, the data are in, and that isn’t happening.”

For decades, Dr Packer ran the Serengeti Lion Project in Tanzania and lobbied for greater oversight of the country’s hunting industry. His tenure ended in 2014, when Tanzanian wildlife officials barred him from the country, citing derogatory statements he made about the industry in an e-mail.

Months later, the killing of a beloved lion named Cecil by an American tourist in Zimbabwe set off a firestorm over the ethics of big-game hunting. But while the debate that ensued attracted global attention, it failed to address a fundamental challenge: If African wildlife cannot pay its own way, who will?

The answer, increasingly, is what is known as “collaborative management”. More and more, the African wildlife authorities are partnering non-profit organisations to secure ecologically valuable landscapes. And as these public-private ventures have in recent years proliferated across the continent, they have channelled philanthropic capital to conservation efforts on an extraordinary scale.

The use of philanthropy to support conservation is hardly a new phenomenon; many of America’s most iconic protected areas owe their existence, in part or in whole, to gifts of land and money. But while governance and operations have long been the exclusive domain of the state, new collaborative management models take a hybrid approach, using private resources



Located in central Mozambique, Gorongosa National Park and the buffer zone that surrounds it cover some 3,367sq km. PHOTO: ISTOCK



Dentist Walter Palmer set off a firestorm over the ethics of big-game hunting after he killed a beloved lion named Cecil in Zimbabwe in 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

and technical expertise to protect and expand lands held by the government while restoring native habitat and rebuilding populations of wildlife.

One prominent example of such a philanthropy is the American Prairie Reserve, a non-profit that raises private funds to stitch together more than 1.2 million ha of existing public lands across Montana’s northern Great Plains. There is also Tompkins Conservation, a group founded by American philan-

thropist Kristine McDivitt Tompkins and her husband, Douglas, to create national parks and restore ecosystems in Chile and Argentina. The group’s donation of more than a million acres of restored conservation land to the government of Chile prompted the creation last year of five new national parks and the expansion of three others.

Nowhere are the stakes higher, though, than in Africa, home to the world’s largest intact ecosystems, close to a quarter of global biodiversity, and some of the planet’s highest rates of human population growth.

“People all over the world enjoy African wildlife, but for those who live next to these animals, it’s a daily challenge,” I was told by Ms Mujon Baghai, an independent researcher and the leading author of a recent study of protected areas in Africa. “Their crops get raided, their livestock may get eaten, and they forgo opportunities to use the land in other ways,” she said. “The international community has a responsibility to help preserve these wild places and to do in ways that ensure local communities benefit.”

In the study, Ms Baghai and her colleagues examined the strengths and weaknesses of various partnership models. “By far the most successful are those that are long-term,” she said. “Projects like Gorongosa in Mozambique and, on a much larger scale, African Parks.”

The latter, an international non-profit founded in 2000, may be best known for resurrecting Malawi’s Majete Wildlife Reserve, or more recently, Zakouma National Park in Chad. Today, the organisation has a portfolio of 15 parks and protected areas in nine African countries, with an annual budget of US\$45 million (\$\$61 million), management contracts of 20 years or more on average and a new president in Britain’s Prince Harry.

Both organisations claim to take an inclusive approach to conservation. They say they recognise the key role of local and indigenous people in protecting biodiversity, solicit their input in managerial decisions and couple conservation activities with projects designed to benefit surrounding communities.

To the architects of the Gorongosa Project, which was established in 2008, the animating objective has been to transform the park into “an engine of human and economic development” – a goal that traces its origins to the early 1990s, when Mozambique’s President at the time, Mr Joaquim Chissano, began planning for a recovery when the civil war ended.

Like his friend and contemporary, Mr Nelson Mandela, Mr Chissano was an early champion of so-called peace parks – trans-frontier conservation areas designed to encourage cooperation and prevent conflict between neighbouring states. He believed that Gorongosa could play a similar role within Mozambique itself: That by generating jobs and rural development, a revitalised national park could help heal the wounds of war.

Of course, an impoverished Mozambique could not do it alone, so Mr Chissano went about court-ing partners. When he met Mr Carr, through the Mozambican ambassador to the United Nations, the tech mogul-turned-philanthropist had recently made some large donations to projects promoting human rights, including US\$18 million to establish the Carr Centre for Human Rights Policy at Harvard University. At the time, though, Mr Carr was casting about for a new project

to throw himself into. When he arrived in Gorongosa, he knew he had found it.

In 2008, he committed US\$20 million to the park’s restoration as part of a 20-year co-management agreement with the Mozambican government. Since then, he has added some US\$40 million more, and the government has extended that agreement by another 25 years. With the return of wildlife – including, most recently, packs of endangered painted wolves – plaudits have poured in from across the conservation community.

Mr Mateus Mutemba, formerly the warden of Gorongosa and now general director of Mozambique’s National Administration of Conservation Areas, credits much of that success to strengthened security measures and science-driven management. But he said any gains would be only temporary without investments made beyond the park’s borders. “It’s this idea that ecosystem health and human health are two sides of the same coin,” Mr Mutemba said. “In the long run, that’s the only way this works.”

“We all know the origin story of national parks in Africa,” Mr Carr told me one afternoon during a game drive through the park, where he spends roughly half of every year. “They were created by colonial regimes and they were essentially fortresses: open to white, Western tourists but closed to the people whose natural heritage they were meant to protect.”

It was Mr Chissano’s idea, he said, to take that legacy of colonial rule and turn it on its head – to put the national park at the service of its neighbours.

Mr Carr and his team – more than 98 per cent of the park’s permanent employees are Mozambicans, and 85 per cent are local hires – have endeavoured to do just that. Of Gorongosa’s US\$15 million budget for last year, US\$5 million went to “conservation”.

The rest was spent outside the park, much of it on a suite of social programmes serving local villages: after-school girls’ clubs aimed at preventing early marriage and nurturing an interest in the sciences; training and assistance in sustainable agriculture; and mobile medical clinics through which the park implements Mozambique’s national rural healthcare strategy.

Speaking at a conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in 2017, Mr Carr said people often ask him what should be done to protect African wildlife. “And every time I say, ‘Girls in school,’” he said. “It’s the No. 1 thing we will do for this planet.”

To that end, he added, Gorongosa supports girls’ clubs in approximately 50 local schools, trains female scientists through a new master’s programmes in conservation biology and employs women as scientists, administrators, and park rangers.

As a young girl in Beira, a port city just north of the park, Ms Dominique Goncalves grew up hearing her father’s stories of Gorongosa. “At that time, if you were black, you had to be *assimilado* to get in,” she said, using the old Portuguese term for those subjects of the colonial empire with social standing or money. Ms Goncalves’ family had neither.

Today, local people make up the single largest demographic of visitors to Gorongosa, and Ms Goncalves, now a research fellow working at the park, says that when she meets young girls, “they want to hear my stories”. NYTIMES

100,000

Number of large mammals counted by researchers last October in Gorongosa National Park; this is an increase of more than 700 per cent over figures from a decade ago.

OBITUARIES

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1800-289-9988 or 6319-5192

*With gratitude for a beautiful soul whose life touched the hearts of many.
Dearly missed & fondly remembered, always, by loved ones.*



MRS GOMATHI GUNASEKARAN (KOMALA VILAS RESTAURANTS)

passed away peacefully on 23.2.2019.

Husband: Rajoo Gunasekaran

Son:

Rajakumar Gunasekaran

Daughters:

Gayathri Gunasekaran
Jayanthi Gunasekaran
Vasanthi Gunasekaran

Grandson:

Ajay Kumar DeCastro

Granddaughter:

Anya Devi DeCastro

Sons-in-law:

Rafique DeCastro
Thamizh Amizthan

Brother:

Palanivelu Balasubramanian & family

Nephew:

Muthukumaran Samaiyyan
Gangka Periasamy

The wake is held at Singapore Casket no. 131 Lavender Street level 3, Jade Hall, Singapore 328737.

Cortege will leave on 24.2.2019 @ 6pm for Mandai Crematorium for cremation at 7pm.

(Ms. Vasanthi Gunasekaran 9092 6235)

With Deepest Sympathy & Heartfelt
Condolences to
The Family of the Late



MRS GOMATHI GUNASEKARAN (KOMALA VILAS RESTAURANTS)

From



INDIAN RESTAURANTS ASSOCIATION SINGAPORE

Gayatri Restaurant
Jaggis Restaurant
Casuarina Curry
The Banana Leaf Apolo
Suriya Restaurant
Gandhi Restaurant
Raj Restaurant
Madras New Woodlands
Spice Junction
Komala's Restaurants
Brinda's Restaurant

Ananda Bhavan Restaurant
Riverwalk Tandoor Restaurant
Samy's Curry Restaurant
Samyal by 6ixers
Sakunthala's Restaurant
Anjappar Restaurant
Saravanaa Bhavan Restaurant
Moghul Mahal Restaurant
Natarajan & Swaminathan
Chartered accountants
Mohan group of companies
Muthu's Curry Restaurant

2nd Anniversary In Loving Memory of



STEPHEN LEUNG YUE TAK

Departed on 24th February 2017

Dearly missed and remembered by loved ones:

Patricia	Andrea
<i>Children & Children-in-law</i>	
Vanessa	Peter Goh
Valencia	Dr. Chew Wu Chong
Stephanie	Lee Coleman
Michelle	Vincent Lee
Bernie	Shen Xuhuai
<i>Grandchildren</i>	
David Goh	Bernard Chew
Natalie Goh	Brandon Chew
Jaykin Lee	Maximilian Coleman
Kaelyn Lee	Emma Leung

*Those we love don't go away,
They walk beside us everyday.
Unseen, unheard but always near,
Still loved, still missed and very dear.*



MURUGIAH (PATTUVIDUTHI OORANIPURAM ORATHANADU)

Age: 83

passed away peacefully on 13/2/19

Dearly missed by family and loved ones.

Karumathi prayers will be held on Wednesday, 27/2/19 night at Blk 893B Woodlands Drive 50, #02-109 Singapore 731893.

Athmasanthi Poojai will be held on Thursday, 28/2/19 at 7.30pm at Sri Siva Durga Temple, No. 8, Potong Pasir Avenue 2, Singapore 358362.

Please treat this as a personal invitation.
Tel: 9025 7275



Pachappapillay Thangaraju

Bah Tan Road (Chong Pang)

Age: 99

Passed away peacefully on 23 February 2019, dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife:
Anchali d/o Sarampillai (deceased)
Children, in-laws, grandchildren, great-grandchildren.
Wake is held at Block 37, Sin Ming Drive #01-5/5, Singapore 575711. Tel: 9759 5075
Cortege leaves on Sunday 24 February 2019 at 6.00pm for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1 for cremation at 7.15pm.

With sweet remembrance



CHUA JU EE @ CHUA YEN CHENG

Departed 24 Feb 1996

Always remembered by family and loved ones



CLEMENT TAN RI MING

Age: 19

Passed Away on 20th February 2019
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones

Father: Tan Zee Thing (Christopher)

Mother: Melissa Lim Lay Keow

Sister: Melanie Tan Ri Fang

Paternal Grandparents:

Tan Eng Kiam (Deceased),

Foo Ah Moi @ Ong Tiew Eng

Maternal Grandparents:

Lim Chwee Inn (Deceased),

Goh Liu Tee

And All Other Relatives

A three-day wake will be held on 24th Feb 2019 (Sunday), from 5pm to 26th Feb 2019 (Tuesday) 12.30pm at Teochew Temple & Funeral Parlour, 10 Ubi Rd 4, Singapore 408609 (Parlour unit 5 & 6)

Cortege leaves on 26th Feb 2019 (Tuesday) at 12.40pm for short service at Mandai Crematorium Hall 2 and thereafter for cremation at 1.40pm



LIEW RALEIGH

Managing Director of
United Resources Marketing
Services Pte Ltd

passed away peacefully on 22nd February 2019.

Dearly missed and fondly remembered by
Management & Staff of
United Resources Marketing Services Pte Ltd

Wake is held at Blk 518 Jurong West St 52.
Tel: 9626 9215

Cortege will leave on 26 Feb 2019 (Tue) at 2.30pm for Mandai Crematorium Hall 4 for Cremation at 3.30pm.



NG SOON NAM EDMUND

Age: 65

passed away peacefully on 23 February 2019.

Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Tan Guat Lee Jaclyn

Son:

Ng Chin Yuen Eugene

Daughter:

Ng Chin Ling Cheryl

Granddaughter:

Ella Su Zhiyun

Siblings, nephews, nieces, all relatives and friends.

Body is resting at Blk 492C Tampines St 45, S'pore 522492. (Multi-storey carpark at Blk 492A).
Cortege will leave on 27 February 2019 (Wednesday) at 11.45am for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1 for cremation at 12.45pm.

Son-in-law:

Eddie Su Deming



QUAH SWEE LAN

Age: 77

Passed away peacefully on 22 February 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Brothers and Sisters:

Mona Quah Swee Imm
Quah Swee Eng
Robert Quah Sieu Eng
Charles Quah Sieu Hoon
Richard Quah Sieu Hee

Nephews and Nieces:

Elizabeth Quah
James Quah
Michelle Quah
Grace Pang
Leslie Quah

Spouses:

Edward Pang
Ursula Quah
Peggy Chung
Mary Lee (deceased)

Spouses:

Alec Molloy
Toh Choon Yee

And all relatives and friends.

Wake is held at Singapore Casket Level 5, Citrine Hall, 131 Lavender Street, Singapore 338737 from Sunday 24 February 2019, 3.30pm onwards.
Cortege leaves on Monday 25 February 2019 at 5.00pm for Mandai Crematorium Hall 2 for cremation at 6.00pm.



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OBITUARIES

7th Anniversary In Loving Memory of our Late Managing Director



Michael Chew Choon Ling
Departed on 24 February 2012

Dearly missed by
**The Board of Directors,
Management & Staff of
Sanchoon Builders Pte Ltd**

7th Anniversary In Loving Memory of



Michael Chew Choon Ling
Departed on 24 February 2012

Memories of your smile and compassion remain sweet and strong
For your presence is still dearly missed even as the years go on.
Soft as a breeze that surrounds us day and night
We need only reach within for the comfort of your cherished love.

We miss you.

**Forever loved and cherished by
Shirley, Timothy, Michelle and Samantha**



Zee Kok Nam 徐国南

Age: 70

Passed away peacefully on 23 February 2019.

3rd Mother: Fong Poh Yoke

Siblings:
Zee Kok Kwong
Zee Kok Meng (deceased)
Zee Kok Onn
Zee Miow Ling

Spouses:
Yeng Kim Noy Mary (deceased)
Yin Ngan Ying
Liew Shek Fong
Lee Tong See

Nieces and Nephews:
Zee Chia Keong
Zee Yeng Peng
Zee Yoong Kang
Zee Ying Yew
Zee Yeng Yun
Zee Peh San
Zee Shiow Juian
Zee Ying Kiat

Spouses:
Angelina Tiong
Eng Poo Juian
Flora Chan
Oh Su Hin
Ong Pei San

Grand Nieces and Nephews:
Zee Hsin Min
Zee Zhi Heng
Oh Tse Kay
Oh Tse Kit
Zee Ka-Hao
Elizabeth Zee
Audrey Zee
Zee Ka-Yong

Family Helpers:
Glades and Melba

Wake is held at Singapore Casket Level 4, Crystal Hall,
131 Lavender Street, Singapore 338737
from Sunday 24 February 2019, 2.00pm onwards.
Cortege leaves on Wednesday 27 February 2019 at 2.30pm
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 4 for cremation at 3.30pm.

With Deepest Sympathy and
Heartfelt Condolences to the
Family of our late Director



Mr Zee Kok Nam

Departed on 23 February 2019

From:
The Management and Staff of

The Central Construction Company (Pte) Ltd



POLLY POH BEE GEOK
Age: 72

Passed away peacefully on 22 February 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Husband: Chia Hwee Hong

Children:
Chia Yee Ling
Chia Chee Keong

Spouses:
Tong Tuck Fatt
Agnes Chua Bee Neo

Grandchildren:
Tung Yeng, Tung Kei, Guy Ian, Jiun Yeh

And all relatives and friends.

Wake is held at 38 Chu Lin Road,
Singapore 669932.

Nightly prayers will be held from 7pm to 8pm.

Cortege will leave on 26 February 2019 (Tue)
at 8am for Mandai Crematorium Hall 2
for cremation at 9am.

Obituaries

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- Original Death Certificate
- Identity Card of person placing the announcement
- Details to be included in the announcement, e.g. list of family names, information on wake and funeral

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With Deepest Sympathy and
Heartfelt Condolences to
The Family of the late



LOO GUAT HOON
Departed on 23 February 2019

From:

Chief Executive, Management and Staff of the
Defence Science and Technology Agency

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."
Philippians 1:21



Chua Hup Neo

29 July 1923 - 22 February 2019

Was called home to be with the Lord on 22 February 2019.
Dearly missed by loved ones.

Wake will be held at Singapore Funeral Parlour Level 4,
Lotus Room, 91 Tampines Link, Singapore 528746
from Sunday 24 February 2019, 12.00pm onwards.

Service will be on Sunday 24 February 2019 at 8.00pm.

Cortege leaves on Monday 25 February 2019 at 1.45pm
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 4 for cremation at 2.45pm.



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Invest



Me & My Property

Sebastian Tan is a disciplined saver and has made capital gains from six properties. **B14**

12 ways to use that financial windfall wisely

Use the extra cash for even greater long-term gains, financial security



Lorna Tan
Invest Editor

Most of us have received our salary increments and annual bonuses by now while some lucky ones might have become millionaires, thanks to the collective sale fever that gripped Singapore over the past couple of years. It's certainly been a golden age for some home owners. Sales notched up a blockbuster

performance last year with 35 residential deals valued at around \$10 billion, the highest in more than a decade. Add in the deals from 2017 and 2016, and you have a collective sale cycle of 65 transactions worth \$19.1 billion, just under the record of \$21.8 billion in the 2005-2007 round.

Whether you have reaped a modest amount from a tax rebate, a pay rise or bonus, or a king's ransom, there are certain investing rules that apply across the board. Financial experts say it is prudent to resist the temptation to splurge it all. Before you rush out to make a down payment on a new car or buy that bling, think about how you can use this extra cash for even greater long-term gains and financial security. See this as an opportune time to review your portfolio, which should include assets, investments and loans. One way is to apportion your bonus based on your need to clear debts with high interest, build an emergency fund, insurance needs, and investments. The Sunday Times highlights 12 financial tips to manage your windfall.

1. Set up a budget and savings plan

A windfall offers a good opportunity to kick-start a savings plan. Many people prioritise their monthly spending in this order: The biggest item is likely to be the mortgage or rent followed by car loan instalments, utility bills and food. They then scrape the bottom of the barrel to cover the monthly minimum on their credit card bills.

Try a different approach: Pay yourself first. Saving at least 10 per cent of your net pay is a good start to accumulating wealth over time. This will force you to become more careful in your spending as the other bills must still be paid.

In fact, if you are fortunate to get a pay rise, putting away the increment each month will go a long way towards helping you achieve medium- or long-term goals. Do the same with annual bonuses.

Before you start investing your savings, it is prudent to ensure that you have set aside an emergency fund that can cover at least six months of monthly expenses.

Aside from the risk of a job loss, the fund can also help you to cover rainy days resulting from unexpected medical expenses due to an illness or temporary disability from an accident.

Provident chief executive Christopher Tan recommends opening at least three bank accounts to facilitate the allocation of your monthly pay into an income, savings and investment, and fixed-expenses accounts. Doing so enables you to "pay yourself first", an important aspect of budgeting.

2. Earn more interest for "loyalty" savings accounts

Several banks have rolled out "loyalty" programmes over the past few years so customers can earn higher interest rates and enjoy direct monthly cashbacks when they can fulfil some criteria like regular banking transactions, card spend, investments or salary crediting.

These include the Bank of China SmartSaver, DBS Multiplier account, OCBC 360 account, POSB cashback bonus programme and UOB One account.

3. Pay off debts with high interest costs

Focus on clearing personal loans that have high interest charges and are costly to maintain, such as credit cards, which levy as much as 24 per cent a year.

Making just the minimum payment on your card instead of paying in full each month means interest is charged on the principal sum owed. So if you have a \$5,000 debt against your card for a year, you could end up paying \$1,200 in interest alone.

The Government has set a limit on how much outstanding debt you can have on credit cards and unsecured loans across all financial institutions to help borrowers avoid the debt trap.

The Credit Limit Management Measure as it's called started in January last year. It is aimed at borrowers



with unsecured debt like personal loans or credit cards that exceeds six times their monthly income.

Banks cannot grant any increase in credit limits or any new unsecured credit facilities to such a person if these cause the total credit limit to exceed 12 times monthly income. Affected borrowers can continue to use their existing unsecured credit facilities.

You can buy a credit bureau report to check your outstanding balances and credit limits with all the banks.

If you are saddled with heavy debts, check out assistance schemes and repayment options such as the Debt Consolidation Plan.

Under this plan, multiple debts are consolidated into a single account so borrowers need to pay only a fixed monthly amount to one financial institution, making it easier to clear the loans.

Don't bother about investing until you have lowered your debt to a manageable level.

4. Top up CPF accounts

Maximise your nest-egg or that of your loved ones by topping up Central Provident Fund (CPF) accounts to leverage attractive interest rates and compounding.

5. Contribute to Supplementary Retirement Scheme (SRS)

The SRS is a voluntary scheme that



complements your CPF savings for retirement.

You can contribute any amount to your SRS account and as many times as you wish within the year, subject to a cap.

Parking your savings in an account not only makes you eligible for some tax relief but you can also stretch your dollar by investing your money. You can use SRS funds to buy a wide range of investments, including insurance plans such as single-premium endowment policies, unit trusts or shares.

An SRS contribution made on or before Dec 31 will qualify for tax relief in the following Year of Assessment. The prevailing cap is \$15,300 a year for Singaporeans and permanent residents, and \$35,700 for foreigners. The minimum age to open an SRS account is 18.

6. Assess protection needs

Have a thorough audit to assess your insurance plans and cover. If both areas are lacking, you could use part of the windfall to pay for any additional coverage. But ensure that any additional regular premiums are affordable and sustainable.

7. Kick-start an investment plan

Financial experts advise wannabe investors to map out their investment time horizon, determine a realistic time frame versus liquidity needs and decide which asset classes are the most appropriate.

Once a holistic plan is in place, you will have a framework in which to make future financial decisions, which include knowing how best to optimise your windfall.

To understand the power of compounding interest, use the simple "rule of 72" to calculate how long a sum will take to double. If the investment return is, say, 10 per cent, then it would take slightly longer than seven years for an initial investment of \$10,000 to double to \$20,000. The number of years is calculated by dividing 72 by 10, that is, the rate of investment return.

Start by learning about investment products and strategies and begin to invest – even in small amounts – regularly.

8. Review your investment portfolio

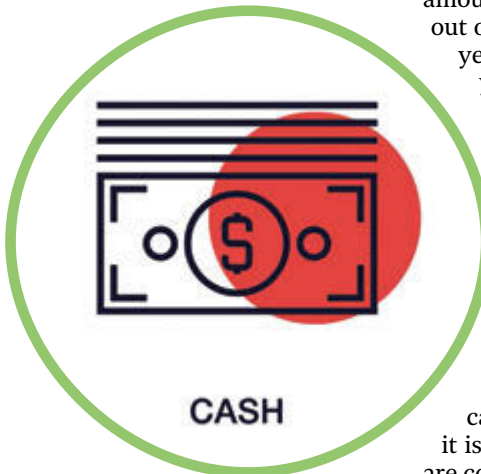
When constructing a portfolio, asset allocation and diversification are key as it is very unlikely that a single asset class will deliver the highest return all of the time. So combining different asset classes in a portfolio can diversify the risks and improve returns over the longer term.

Furthermore, review and rebalance your plan as personal circumstances change. It is a good idea to review your portfolio once a year and consider rebalancing whenever you go through major life events, such as getting married or having a baby.

9. Review your home loans

The rising Singapore Interbank Offered Rate (Sibor) has prompted banks to raise home loan rates and it is likely that Sibor may continue going up. It is no wonder that some borrowers have turned to fixed-rate mortgages for greater peace of mind.

Refinancing – switching to a loan package that offers lower rates – is a great alternative for those whose lock-in periods are ending. Lock-in periods typically run for two or three years.



However, do your sums and ensure that the total amount saved from doing so exceeds the cost, such as refinancing fees, legal fees and pre-payment penalties. Interest savings will diminish in a rising interest-rate environment.

Some home owners undertake capital repayments to reduce their loan amount in the beginning of the year, likely because they use their bonus or savings.

This is a good practice to reduce your financial commitment, especially if these are spare funds where you are unable to get a yield higher than your loan rate. Generally, home owners are advised to use cash instead of CPF funds since CPF pays at least 2.5 per cent.

Other options to manage your

mortgage commitments include right-sizing your loan amount via capital repayments or lengthening your loan tenor.

10. Tips for collective sale millionaires

Home owners who have reaped big money in collective sales should be "very prudent" in approaching their windfall, says Aggregate Asset Management.

Those looking for a new home could consider downsizing and get the rest of their funds to work harder by investing in other asset classes aside from real estate.



"Assuming that the average en bloc millionaire will need to find a replacement home with, say, \$2.5 million on hand, they could buy a decent-size condo for \$1.5 million, with \$1 million put aside for investing," says Mr Wong Seak Eng, a fund manager from Aggregate Asset Management.

One option is to spread the funds over a diversified basket of equities and bonds. This will reap larger returns in the long run and can even be used to fund a retirement income.

"Based on our study, a safe withdrawal rate of 5 per cent can generally fund the retirement of investors till the end of their life span. For illustration, with \$1 million invested in equities, one can withdraw \$50,000 every year to fund their retirement," said Mr Wong.

The safe withdrawal rate is the amount of money that you can take out of your retirement funds each year, with the ability for future years' withdrawals to increase with inflation, and with a high likelihood that this money will last for the remainder of your life.

11. Look out for credit and debit cards that best suit your needs

With the wide selection of cards and their reward schemes, it is no wonder that some people are confused as to which is the best card. Surveys have shown that consumers here prefer cards that offer rebates.

Identify the categories you usually spend on and check the minimum spending to qualify for rebates. Take a close look at the various card fees first. These include annual fees, late penalties and interest levied on outstanding debt.

12. Reward yourself

For those who have set up a sound financial plan and addressed their retirement needs adequately, be kind and reward yourself. After all, you have worked hard and you should enjoy the fruits of your labour along your life journey.

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SmallChange

Live long and prosper with CPF Life

While I prefer the old scheme's 20-year fixed payout, it's CPF Life that will provide me a monthly income for as long as I live



Dennis Chan

Ten years ago, the Central Provident Fund (CPF) Board introduced CPF Life after studies showed that Singaporeans were living longer and longer, with many past age 85 when their monthly retirement payout would have run out under the old Retirement Sum Scheme.

CPF Life is the national annuity plan, providing lifelong income throughout retirement, which is the logical thing to do to avoid a situation in which one's savings or income runs out before one's life does.

But I have to confess I was among those who were dismayed at the change. I hasten to add, though, that I understand the rationale for introducing CPF Life. As more and more people live beyond 85, a failure to prepare for this ageing phenomenon will unfairly burden the future generation.

But just as one can accept taking bitter medicine to cure an ailment, it doesn't mean that one has to like it. Despite some shortcomings, I liked the old scheme for its simplicity and certainty. At 55, you set aside a minimum sum – equivalent to \$120,000 in 2003 dollar terms – which you would then draw down upon turning 65 in monthly instalments for 20 years. (If I should live longer, I have my own contingency plans.)

The precise amount could be easily ascertained since there were hardly any variables to feed into the equation. Should you die before fully utilising the retirement account, the balance sum that you put in plus accrued interest will be paid to your nominees.

In comparison, the quantum of CPF Life payout is not certain. As a

national annuity plan, it works by commingling your minimum sum with those of other retirees. This provides for a pooling of risk so that every member is guaranteed a lifelong payout.

But this also means the actual payout you will receive cannot be pre-determined as it will depend on not just your longevity but also that of others. Which is why the illustration of the payout under CPF Life is presented not as a solitary figure but a range of figures.

And because it promises a lifelong payout based on a fixed starting sum to fund an indeterminate payout period – which may extend to well beyond 85 – the quantum of monthly payment must necessarily be lower than the Retirement Sum Scheme, which was fixed for 20 years. The current estimates on CPF Life payouts are based on certain presumptions of mortality.

If a significant number of people live far longer than expected, the anticipated payout may be less than current projections.

On a positive note, the cumulative payment you will receive under CPF Life will certainly be higher if you live beyond 85. The longer you live, the higher is the difference in quantum compared with the Retirement Sum Scheme.

Beyond the issue of certainty, CPF Life is made more complicated by the numerous choices. Within the scheme, there are numerous configurations for members to choose their preferred payouts based on their affordability level, payout needs and appraisal of their own mortality.

If you are looking for a higher payout, you have the option of delaying the start of your drawdown. In return, you will receive up to 7 per cent more in payouts for each year deferred until the age of 70.

This level of flexibility is not available under the Retirement Sum Scheme and should be welcomed by those who want a greater say in determining how much they stand to receive.

But therein lies the conundrum. To pick the right plan, you are forced to undertake an educated assessment – nay, make that a wild guess – of your own mortality.

Think you are going to have a short life after retirement? Pick the CPF Life Basic Plan, as it will leave a bigger bequest to your loved ones. Choose the Standard Plan if you reckon you are going to live long.



Lastly is the optimal plan if you feel – deep in your gut – that you will live for a long, long time. Known as the Escalating Plan, you start off on a lower monthly payout, which escalates by 2 per cent for every year that you live.

This is where psychology plays an important role in decision-making. An optimistic or prudent member is likely to opt for a bigger payout. A pessimist or one who wants to withdraw as much of his CPF savings as possible at 55, on the other hand, may be drawn to opt for the bare minimum. There is also the issue of blind faith or false hope.

As most people desire to live in good health to a ripe old age, there is a natural bias to opt for a plan with the highest payout. But since no one can tell the difference between intent and wishful thinking, there is plenty of room for buyer's remorse.

It has been reported that one in two Singaporeans aged 65 today is expected to live beyond 85, and one in three will live beyond 90. But

...you don't have to commit to a plan until you start to receive your CPF Life payout. This could mean delaying it until as late as when you turn 70. At that age, your physical condition may give you a better idea of the kind of payouts you will want to receive for the rest of your life.

from what I have observed in the obituary pages of The Straits Times, the age of the individuals varies quite a fair bit.

Sure, big data is useful in policymaking and planning by the Government for the future needs of Singaporeans. But, at the individual level, you can never tell if you fall to the left or right of the median on the longevity curve.

The good news is that you don't have to commit to a plan until you start to receive your CPF Life payout. This could mean delaying it until as late as when you turn 70. At that age, your physical condition may give you a better idea of the kind of payouts you will want to receive for the rest of your life.

The CPF website has a helpful tool, CPF Life Estimator, to compare the three plans in terms of dollars and cents.

Assuming you turn 55 this year, set aside the Full Retirement Sum of \$176,000 and start your CPF Life payout at 65, the monthly sum from the Escalating Plan will surpass that of the Basic Plan by the time you turn 73.

At 77, your payout will begin to exceed that of the Standard Plan, and be widening all the time for as long as you live. By the time you hit 95, the Escalating Plan is estimated to be 60 per cent more than the Basic and 43 per cent ahead of the Standard plan.

In terms of the amount you would accumulate over the years, it will take you longer to reach the break-even point, which is around 80 in the Basic and 89 for the Standard plan.

So what does that tell you about the Escalating Plan? Live long to prosper.

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Breaking my addiction to ‘active management’

Rather than using predictive methods to beat the market, it’s better to just invest regularly



Christopher Tan

On Dec 22 last year, I invested the money in my Supplementary Retirement Scheme account into one of the investment portfolios that my company manages. About a month later on Jan 19, I checked on how it has performed and to my pleasant surprise, it has grown 7.64 per cent.

I was very excited about it and shared the performance with my management team. One of my colleagues who invested in the same portfolio as me in September last year, however, “complained” that his portfolio was still down by 12 per cent.

He jokingly said that I was the best “market timer” and when I decide to put in the next tranche, I should inform everyone so that they could follow me. I felt good.

In January this year, I decided that I would put in my second tranche. But because of my previous “good performance” and because I was ranked the best “market timer” last month, I wanted to repeat my performance to “guard

my reputation”.

I was still thinking about the timing at which I should invest this second tranche when it suddenly hit me: Why am I not doing what I have been preaching all this while, that is, not to “actively” manage my investment?

So, what exactly is active management?

To explain this simply, assume you are investing into the United States stock market represented by the S&P 500 Index. The S&P 500 consists of 500 big names such as 3M, Johnson & Johnson, Microsoft, Netflix, Nike and the like.

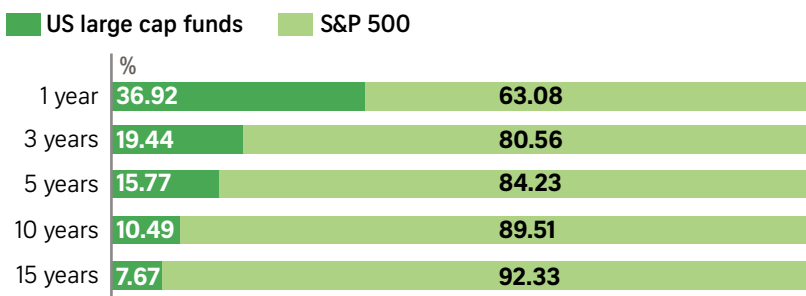
The prices of each of these stocks move up and down differently every business day based on what buyers and sellers decide their price should be. If they collectively move up on average, we can say that the US market represented by the S&P 500 has gone up. And, of course, if they collectively move down on average, we can say that the market has fallen.

So today, if you have bought the S&P 500 via an exchange-traded fund (ETF) and stayed invested over time, you will get close to the market performance.

But if you want to get a different performance – hopefully, a better performance – instead of staying invested in the S&P 500 ETF, you could do a few things:

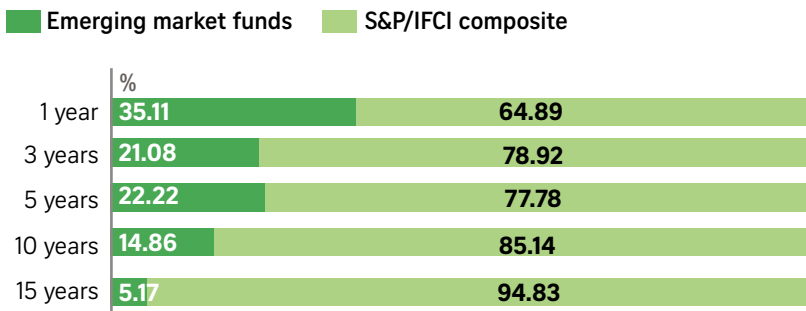
Fund performance

US large cap actively managed equity funds in the US that outperformed the S&P 500 benchmark



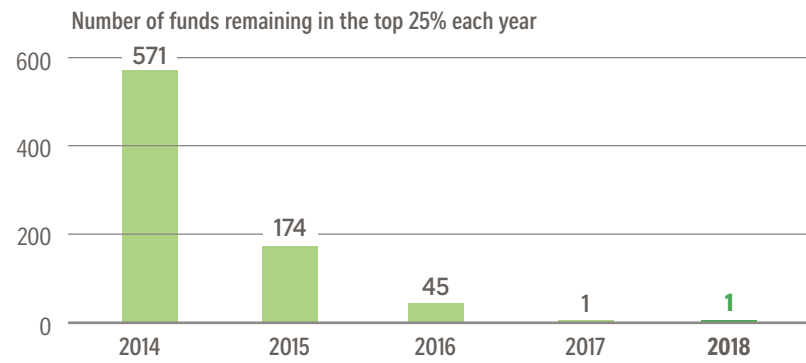
NOTE:
• Data as of Dec 29, 2017.
• Over a one-year period, only about 37 per cent of US actively managed large cap equity funds in the US outperformed the S&P 500 benchmark. Over a 15-year period, this dipped to about 7.7 per cent.

Emerging market actively managed funds in the US that outperformed the S&P/IFCI composite benchmark



NOTE:
• Data as of Dec 29, 2017. Outperformance is based upon equal weighted fund counts.
• All index returns used are total returns.
• Over a one-year period, only about 35.11 per cent of emerging market actively managed funds in the US outperformed the S&P/IFCI Composite benchmark. Over a 15-year period, this dipped to about 5.17 per cent.

Active fund performance persistence



NOTE:
• Data as of March 31, 2018.
• The same actively managed funds remaining in the top 25 per cent performance category dwindled over the years – from 571 in year 2014 to 45 in 2016, and to just one last year.
• This shows that even for those that performed well, they could not beat the market consistently.

Sources: S&P DOW JONES INDICES LLC, CRSP, MONEYOWL SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

- Choose the best time to sell the S&P 500 ETF when you think it is expensive and buy it when you feel that it is cheap again.
- Sell your ETF and buy individual stocks that are totally different from the S&P 500 if you believe that the stocks you have chosen will do better than the S&P 500.
- Sell your ETF and pick only those few stocks in the S&P 500 that you think will be winners, instead of also owning other stocks that you think will be losers in the short term.
- Sell your investment in the S&P 500 and, say, invest in the Japanese market, that is, the Nikkei 225 Index if you believe that it will do better than the S&P 500 in the short term.
- Sell your investment in the S&P 500 and buy into the S&P 500 Bond Index if you feel that the bond market will do better than the stock market in the short term.
- Do all of the above, and keep moving in and out of different markets and different asset classes (bonds to stocks or the reverse), whenever you feel it is better to do so in the short term.

When you continue to do the above using predictive methods based on factors such as geopolitical data, economic data or past trends, or you buy unit trusts that perform the above, you are effectively “actively” managing your investments. And it all seems to make sense.

But does active management work? Can one really accurately predict the future most of the time?

As much as we want to believe that there are many people out there (especially professionals) who can accurately predict when is the best time to get in and out of the market, or to switch from one asset class to another to beat the market, there is sufficient data to show that this is not the case.

A check with the past performance of actively managed US large cap equity funds and emerging market funds in the US indicated that most active managers cannot beat the markets whether in the short or long term.

Over a one-year period, only about 37 per cent of the US actively managed large cap equity funds in the US outperformed the S&P benchmark. Over a longer 15-year

period, this dipped to about 7.7 per cent. The same scenario is observed for emerging market actively managed funds in the US.

According to data as of March 31 last year, when monitoring the actively managed funds in the top 25 per cent performance category, the same funds remaining in the category dwindled over the years – from 571 in year 2014 to 45 in 2016, and to just one last year. This shows that even for those who performed well, they could not beat the market consistently.

So, why would you want to pay such high management fees (average of about 1.75 per cent a year) to someone who cannot do better than the market most of the time?

Why would you pay someone to “gamble” away your money by making predictions when you can simply get the real investment returns from a low-cost index fund such as Vanguard (average fee of about between 0.2 and 0.4 per cent a year) or low-cost evidence-based funds such as Dimensional Fund Advisors (average fee of about 0.3 to 0.5 per cent a year)?

My latest experience helped me understand why. Because it stroked my ego when I could guess better than others. And even though I know from evidence that the chances of me repeating my out-performance are very low, I still wanted to try. I was addicted to my one-time success.

Thankfully for me, my head of investment brought me to my senses when he reminded us to regularly invest instead of trying to time the market.

But it was my wife who really broke my “addiction”. When she found out that I kept checking the performance of my investment, she chided me: “Check every day for what? Some days it will be up and some days it will be down. It’s not as if you are using the money now. Most importantly, when you need the money, it is up.”

I got her point. So I decided to cure my addiction by putting myself on Giro, and now regularly invest on a monthly basis instead of trying to guess the market.

I am afraid my wife may take over my job soon.

• The writer is chief executive officer at Provident, a fee-only retirement financial adviser, and executive director of MoneyDwl, Singapore’s first bionic financial adviser.

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Fund manager interview series

Keep an eye on financial tightening

PineBridge Investments' senior portfolio manager for Asian fixed income Omar Slim discusses his outlook on the Asian fixed income markets in the latest of our series on fund managers and market experts.



Lorna Tan
Invest Editor

Mr Omar Slim is responsible for managing funds investing in the Asian credit, rates and forex markets. Before joining PineBridge in 2013, he was a senior portfolio manager in Asian fixed income at State Street Global Advisors (SSGA) in Singapore. He started there as a credit analyst for global active fixed income in Canada, before being promoted to senior portfolio manager to manage a team investing in the North American credit markets.

In his most recent Singapore-based SSGA role, Mr Slim led the development of the Asian credit investment process in Asia, helped build up its credit coverage and managed local and hard currency Asian fixed income portfolios.

He also participated in a number of government-sponsored policy initiatives to develop and enhance the Asian bond markets.

Before SSGA, Mr Slim was a research analyst at BNP Paribas Corporate & Investment Banking.

He holds a master's in finance from Boston College's Carroll Graduate School of Management. He also attended the Investment Decisions and Behavioural Finance Executive Education programme at Harvard Kennedy School. Mr Slim is a CFA charter holder.

Q What themes does PineBridge foresee dominating the Asian fixed income markets in 2019?

A We think there will be three dominant themes in the Asian fixed income markets. The first is the continuous, but more gradual, monetary policy normalisation, which impacts financial conditions directly.

The second is that the credit cycle has peaked and as such, one needs to be highly selective in credit selection. The third is related to China, its ongoing deleveraging, its economic and political relationships with the United States and its economic policy fine-tuning.

Q What do these themes mean for investors?

A Those themes mean you have to be surgical in your credit selection and very calibrated in risk-taking, cognisant that we are entering a new post-quantitative easing phase that does not have the same kind of parental support from the central banks. It also means that one need not get carried away by being overly negative, as the fundamentals generally for Asian fixed income, particularly in the investment-grade segment, remain good and opportunities abound.

Q How is the region's investment-grade asset class doing? What does local monetary policy mean for this segment of the market?

A It's one asset class that has been performing relatively well, and remains very interesting, particularly from a risk-adjusted or volatility-adjusted basis. The USD-denominated Asian investment-grade market is supported by strong fundamentals, strong technical factors, especially given that Asia is a growing money pool with a home bias, and also more interesting valuations than other markets such as the US investment-grade market or euro bond market.

Local monetary policy has some impact on it, but it tends to be mostly influenced by the US monetary policy as well as some of the large investor markets' behaviour, which continues to be supportive.

Q S&P just pushed out a fresh alert on China's debt/Chinese issuers, a threat which has been looming over investors for more than a decade. What is your view on this lingering concern?

A There are always risks that investors need to be aware of. The Chinese risks that rating agencies tend to focus on are increasing systemic leverage, offshore subordination and policy direction. Among those three, clearly systemic leverage is one that concerns them the most.

To be fair, the Chinese policymak-

ers are aware of that, given their insistence on going through with the deleveraging campaign, even though they have headwinds from trade and a potential economic slowdown.

Chinese policymaking this year has been credible and cognisant of the risks they face. Our investment thesis takes that into account, and our view is that the investment-grade segment presents an opportunity to conservatively allocate an exposure to China and Asia broadly.

Q What are the major risks investors should be aware of in Asia/emerging markets in 2019?

A Tighter financial conditions. This was the single most important driver of the markets last year and one that is expected to carry on, to some ex-



Mr Omar Slim says the good thing is that financial tightening has been at least partly factored into the markets now. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

Investor tips

- Live with the reality that markets go up and down.
- Invest first and foremost in your abilities to search for opportunities.
- Maintain good investment discipline regardless of how markets are moving.
- Make sure you don't become greedy or panicky.
- Invest in what you understand.

Lorna Tan

A Bonds tend to be more stable than stocks and other investments. Returns are usually lower, but they provide some stability to the overall portfolio, which is important. Any heavily invested equity investor this year would tend to agree. Bonds can also enhance the income generation of portfolios, given that bonds pay coupons – a predictable source of income. The bond market is extremely large and very diverse, so investors need to be aware of what kind of exposure they are taking. Some bonds are riskier (and juicier), others are more plain vanilla (and safer). Overall, bonds usually form a core part of investors' allocation.

Q What keeps you awake at night?

A You make risk-controlled investments, capable of withstanding sharp market moves. You sleep well, and come back to office refreshed the next day to continue doing it.

Q If I am not a fund manager, I would be...?

A I would be trying to become one.

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Home sweet home is also a wise investment

Civil servant Sebastian Tan has come a long way from poor childhood days to own property, stocks and insurance



Mr Sebastian Tan bought his current freehold 1,518 sq ft apartment in St. Patrick's Road in 2015, a year after the property got its TOP, for \$2.05 million. It is valued at \$2.5 million or about \$1,650 psf.

Lorna Tan
Invest Editor

Saying that civil servant Sebastian Tan had it tough growing up doesn't come near to describing the hardship of his childhood.

Having three decent meals a day was a luxury for him. His home was a cramped three-room HDB flat in Queen's Crescent that he shared with 10 or 11 others at times.

He was so malnourished then that he was given cartons of milk in the morning in school.

"I grew up in a very poor family in a flat where the utilities were frequently cut off due to non-payment. Maggie mee (curry flavour) was my best friend – I ate that almost every other day as it was probably the cheapest meal back then, with an egg added on rare occasions," he recalls.

Mr Tan, 45, who is responsible for operations in a statutory board, said his mother left home when he was two or three, leaving his father to care for the family, which he managed by working long hours at various odd jobs.

Mr Tan, his brother and their dad lived with his paternal grandmother and her children.

He learnt how to earn a living part-time by peddling otah (grilled fish cake) and festive greeting cards from block to block when he was just eight years old.

He became a caddie at Sentosa Golf Club on weekend mornings when he was 13, and worked part-time during the school holidays.

"Looking back, I am glad that I saved the majority of my bonuses without splurging on luxuries like the latest IT gadgets, including mobile phones, and branded stuff," he says. "I also invested wisely in blue-chip stocks and was not tempted by market hearsay. I'm easily satisfied and would let go, once a certain stock or property has reached my desired/targeted price, and won't be greedy and hope for more upside."

Mr Tan has made capital gains from six properties.

Besides being a volunteer for his grassroots organisation and the Singapore Hokkien Association, he plans to set up a charity foundation.

He graduated with a Bachelor of Justice (International Policing) from Queensland University of Technology in 2002. It was a long-distance programme sponsored by his former employer.

Mr Tan is married to Ms Caren Lim, 40, who works in a govern-



Mr Tan in his living room, his favourite part of the apartment, where he spends lots of time with his wife and daughter chit-chatting, playing board games or watching TV. It is where he also has a huge collection of rare figurines, toys and collectibles in a custom-built display cabinet. ST PHOTOS: JOSEPH CHUA

ment agency. Their daughter Kaizree Jade-Eden is nine.

Q Can you describe your home?

A I bought my current freehold 1,518-square-foot (sq ft) apartment in St Patrick's Road in 2015 for \$2.05 million. At the time, it was one year after it received the Temporary Occupation Permit. It has three bedrooms and a fairly large living room. It is valued at \$2.5 million or about \$1,650 per square foot (psf).

Q Why did you choose this property?

A I had previously lived in that area and I love the vibes and environment. Besides the nice food in the area, being close to East Coast Park means I can go there for my long-distance training runs while enjoying the sea breeze.

It was really a steal for the psf for an almost new freehold apartment in that area. The project beside my condo was already selling at \$1,600 to \$1,700 psf.

It was also very near Tao Nan Primary School, where I wanted to enrol my daughter in.

In addition, the unit was unoccupied and untouched as the seller did not live in it. As I had already sold my apartment, I needed the shortest time possible to move in. And there was a future MRT line (East Coast-Thomson) parallel to it.

Q What is your favourite part of the home?

A It has to be my living room as I spend lots of time there with my wife and daughter chit-chatting, playing board games, watching TV... it was where she would be revising her schoolwork or practising on her piano, and where we would be pampering our three hamsters. I also have a huge collection of rare figurines, toys and collectibles nicely displayed in my custom-built display cabinet in the living room!

Q What's in your property portfolio?

A Except for my first matrimonial home in the early 2000s, when I suffered a \$40,000 loss, albeit in CPF money, I have been extremely lucky to achieve modest gains from all my past properties.

In 2003, I bought a 560 sq ft freehold condo in Kembangan under the Deferred Payment Scheme for \$345,000 and sold it for \$420,000 just before obtaining the Temporary Occupation Permit in 2005.

In 2005, I bought an 829 sq ft leasehold condo in the Marine Parade area for \$370,000 and sold it for \$520,000 in 2007. That year, I bought a 1,760 sq ft jumbo HDB flat in Yishun for \$378,000 and sold it for \$610,000 in 2010. This was followed by a 1,400 sq ft leasehold walk-up apartment in Telok Kurau acquired for \$810,000 in 2010, and sold for \$1.1 million a year later.

In 2011, I bought a 1,830 sq ft leasehold condo in the Pasir Ris area for \$1 million and sold it for \$1.25 million in 2015. In 2013, I bought a 355

sq ft freehold condo in the Sims Avenue area for \$420,000 and sold it for \$550,000 in 2015.

Q Describe your property investing strategy.

A After owning both leasehold and freehold properties, I realised that freehold property is the way to go if you are looking at long-term gains.

When buying a new home, it is actually not rocket science to look at the factors commonly used by many people – near an MRT station and good amenities (wet markets, hawker centre, libraries, eateries, shopping malls). Near good schools would also be a major plus point as there would be (younger) parents who would need it.

Come to think of it, my present home ticked all the boxes. However, I would be looking to sell it once the Marine Terrace MRT station is completed around 2022/2023 as that would be the time when my daughter completes

her primary school education. I would still be looking for a freehold property in the same area.

Q What's your view of the property market?

A Due to the various cooling measures and foresight by our Government to prevent the property market from overheating, it is actually not wise to buy additional properties for investment now (unless you bought those properties before all the various cooling measures were introduced or you really have very deep pockets) as the sub-sale market is as good as dead.

The days when you could make a tidy sum from a short holding period have long gone and are very unlikely to return unless the Government suddenly does away with all the cooling measures, which will not happen any time soon.

Q What's your financing strategy?

A I typically try to take as small a mortgage as possible. I am grateful that my current loan is pegged to my bank's fixed deposit home rate. As it is less volatile compared with the SOR/Sibor, I have peace of mind knowing the monthly instalments won't be increased so regularly.

Q Do you have insurance cover for property and contents?

A On the advice of my wise wife, I am more than sufficiently insured against my property so that my wife and daughter need never worry about mortgage repayments.

Q What's your overall investing strategy?

A I am only holding on to my current property. As I keep very long hours at work, I do not have much time to monitor the market closely and hence most of my portfolio is in blue-chip stocks like Singapore Airlines and Singapore Press Holdings since they are not volatile in nature.

In terms of percentage, I would say I'm 40 per cent invested in property and 30 per cent in stocks with the balance in cash and insurance.

Q My dream home is...

A My dream home would be by the beach front in the East Coast area, which is not possible in Singapore (that's why it is a dream).

For my next home (likely to still be in the East area), besides the bedrooms, ideally it has to have enough space for an individual room to house my toy/figurine collection, a TV/music room, and also a long walkway to display my framed-up posters of movies and artists.

Most importantly, the new home should continue to have plenty of warmth and happiness like in my current home.

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What's New In Property

Budget 2019: A step closer to Smart Nation

Christine Li

Last Monday's Budget was aimed at strengthening the capabilities of both corporates and individuals as the country moves towards an innovation-led economy in the next decade.

There were no specific announcements on real estate. Instead, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat focused heavily on the fundamentals of Singapore's growth story.

This in turn pivoted on the vision of a Smart Nation, where the seamless integration of new technologies on top of digital infrastructure will enable the development of

novel solutions to address challenges and drive growth.

REDUCED FOREIGN WORKER QUOTA

The Government is concerned that foreign worker growth in the service sector will be unsustainable in the long run. There is also a desire to raise productivity in the labour-intensive food and beverage and retail segments.

Therefore, the dependency ratio ceiling for the service sector will be reduced from 40 per cent to 38 per cent on Jan 1 next year and subsequently to 35 per cent on Jan 1, 2021.

The S-Pass ceiling for the service sector will also be reduced from 15

per cent to 13 per cent on Jan 1 next year, with a further reduction to 10 per cent on Jan 1, 2021.

The dependency ratio ceiling refers to the maximum permitted ratio of foreign workers to the total workforce that a company in the stipulated sector is allowed to hire.

For example, the ceiling for the service sector stands at 40 per cent, meaning 40 per cent of the total workforce can be S-pass and work permit holders.

While the phased reduction will alleviate some of the pain, this policy move will result in higher labour costs for retailers and impact landlords' ability to extract rent increases in lease negotiations.

However, the move will enhance the service sector's productivity and resilience in the long term due to the anticipated use of increased automation, revamping of processes and upskilling of workers.

PILOT OF DIGITAL SERVICES LAB

The e-commerce and logistics sector was given another boost with the creation of the Digital Services Lab and continued efforts to help home-grown companies digitise further.

For one, retailers stand to benefit from better last-mile logistics support by partnering third-party delivery companies to enhance the whole customer experience, including same-day deliveries.

Landlords will also be able to tap into large-scale automation such as robotics and Industry 4.0 to manage operations at mall loading bays to prevent traffic congestion.

SINGAPORE: ASIA'S REITS HUB

In a move for the continued promotion of Singapore as a centre for real estate investment trusts (Reits) in Asia, the existing income tax concessions for S-Reits, which were previously slated to end after March 1 next year, will be extended until Dec 31, 2025.

The tax exemption on S-Reit distributions received by individuals and the concessionary income tax rate of 10 per cent for S-Reits distri-

butions received by non-resident non-individual investors will be maintained.

In addition, S-Reits will continue to enjoy tax exemption on qualifying foreign-sourced income, such as dividend income, of overseas property acquired on or before March 31 next year.

Furthermore, GST remission for S-Reits and business trusts will be extended until Dec 31, 2025, which will enable S-Reits to continue claiming GST on business expenses.

The extension of GST remission until 2025 is especially timely, given the planned GST hike of two percentage points between 2021 and 2025.

Extending the tax concessions for another five years will give the market greater certainty and promote the listing of foreign Reits here.

• The writer is senior director and head of Singapore research at property consultancy Cushman & Wakefield.

Life



Slurp-worthy
prawn noodles
C15

C

When money grows on trees

Asking price for this bonsai: \$20,000.
Its owner has had more than 50 small trees
stolen but has hardly made any police reports.
Why? It goes against the “zen” sensibility of
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Breaking the silence on suicide

Moves to decriminalise attempted suicide might remove some of the stigma, allow those in pain to open up and enable others to offer help



Venessa Lee

Grief leaves its marks on the body.

For weeks after her teenage son died by suicide last year, Ms Elaine Lek, 54, wore thick jackets as she felt cold even in boiling weather.

She stopped driving for four months because of panic attacks that left her with heart palpitations and chest pains. She broke out in rashes and food tasted like dust.

It still takes a toll on her to recount how her son, Zen Dylan Koh, died on Oct 1 last year, a month before his 18th birthday.

Yet, even when the tears flood in, she wants to break the silence around this taboo subject. Ms Lek, head of the global brand team at a tableware firm, questions why there is this silence, even while young people can easily find on the Internet methods to kill themselves, like Zen did.

"People talk about sex education in schools, but do they really talk about mental wellness? If we don't use the word suicide, how are we going to talk about it?" asks Ms Lek, who is married to Mr Koh Say Kiong, 58, a sales development director. They have another son who is 16.

Ms Lek applauds recent moves to decriminalise attempted suicide in the Criminal Law Reform Bill, which was read in Parliament earlier this month. It would destigmatise people who are already deeply vulnerable, she says.

Those opposed to the move say, though, that criminalisation could deter people from taking their own lives.

Clinical psychologist Lilian Ing, who works at Fernhill Consultancy, which offers psychology and counselling services, believes that decriminalising attempted suicide will remove some of the silence surrounding the act.

"Criminal stigma is part of a broader issue. We don't talk about death," says Ms Ing, who has worked with suicidal clients during her 25-year career.

"When someone wants to plan his death, we are so frightened and we feel so helpless that we would rather shut it down.

"We need role models who are

willing to speak with searing honesty about the challenges we face in life."

But even if decriminalising attempted suicide encourages more persons at risk to open up and seek help, as she suggests, perhaps another question arises: How do we talk about suicide as a society?

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Ms Lek is attempting to broach this taboo subject by opening up about her son's death.

She recounts how Zen seemed happy to see her on Sept 27 last year when she flew to Melbourne, where he was studying, and they had made plans to meet the next day.

But less than five hours later, he took his own life and died three days later in hospital.

She is struggling to come to terms with why he did so. While he had experienced mental health challenges before, Zen initially settled down well in Melbourne. He moved there in February last year to enrol in a pre-university course at Trinity College in the University of Melbourne.

About half a year earlier, in September 2017, the former Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) student was struggling in his first year at Serangoon Junior College. He became moody and sometimes slept all day. He had relationship problems and had fallen out with some of his friends. His grades were declining.

One day, his parents found scalpel blades in his room. They had noticed self-harm marks on his arms, which he kept hidden under long-sleeved hoodies. Ms Lek later found out he had been taunted by schoolmates about those "barcode" cuts.

She took Zen to a psychiatrist, who diagnosed him as having Attention Deficit Disorder, characterised by inattentiveness and impulsivity. He was given medication and his situation seemed to stabilise.

But he and his parents felt he would do better in a different environment and they eventually picked Trinity College together.

DOWNWARD SPIRAL

A natural athlete, Zen enjoyed skateboarding around Melbourne and going to the gym.

Robert (not his real name), 17, Zen's housemate, says: "My first impression of Zen was that he was a popular, good-looking kid."

Zen had a goofy sense of humour, sometimes putting on a mud mask to spook his friends. He was also generous. A friend, Aurelia (not her real name), 18, recalls how he gave her his \$250 graphing calculator in junior college as she could not afford one.

But there were darker undercurrents behind some of Zen's friendships. Jenny (not her real name), 17, a fellow student in Melbourne, says

she was drawn to Zen as he seemed like someone she could talk to.

But she and Zen, who were platonic friends, sometimes sent each other photos when they had cut themselves.

"Sometimes, the physical pain distracts me. It's a coping method, but it's not good. Still, it's important that people know they're not alone. We would try to support one another," she says.

Once, Zen helped her get through what she described as a mental breakdown. And sometimes, he would text her late at night saying he was sad, and she would go talk to him.

Other friends who rallied around Zen included Robert, who has bipolar disorder, and Aurelia, who has engaged in self-harm before.

Psychiatrist John Wong, from National University Hospital (NUH), warns of possible "negative contagion" in groups with individuals who face mental health challenges.

"It is not uncommon for vulnerable teenagers in similar emotional and social situations to feel for and identify with one another... These vulnerable teens may meet in clinics or hospital inpatient wards or on social media, bonded by a common identity and purpose," says Associate Professor Wong, who is head and senior consultant of NUH's department of psychological medicine.

"This could trigger a negative contagion effect leading to a downward spiral of emotional distress and hopelessness."

MEDICATION RISKS

Around June last year, some of Zen's friends noticed that he seemed depressed. They eventually called Ms Lek to let her know.

They also spent as much time with Zen as possible, ensuring he was not left alone for long.

By July, back in Singapore, Ms Lek realised that Zen was engaging in self-harm again after discovering a secret Instagram account of his from his old phone, where he had posted images of his self-harm.

"There were several 'likes' and even comments like, 'We'll do it together,'" says Ms Lek, her voice clouded with pain.

Although she and her husband visited Zen regularly in Melbourne and were in frequent contact with him, he did not tell her about his self-harm, even when queried.

"He would always tell me, 'Don't worry, mum, I'm okay,'" she says.

In early September, during a break from school, however, she took Zen to another psychiatrist in Singapore, as the first one he saw in 2017 was not available.

He was diagnosed with Generalised Anxiety Disorder and mild depression and prescribed an antidepressant called Lexapro.

Ms Lek says: "He was glad about his diagnosis because he did not know till then what he was suffering from."

But she expressed concern when the psychiatrist reportedly increased Zen's dosage from 2.5mg to 10mg after about a week. He allegedly told her it was routine. She claims she was not told of any possible side effects except insomnia and loss of appetite.

But Lexapro, like other antidepressants in the SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor) class of drugs, has a sting in its tail for a small group of adolescents. A spokesman for Singapore's Health Sciences Authority, noting



People talk about sex education in schools, but do they really talk about mental wellness? If we don't use the word suicide, how are we going to talk about it?



MS ELAINE LOK (above), whose teenage son, Zen Dylan Koh, died on Oct 1 last year. She is holding a drawing of him

that medical conditions such as depression may be associated with an increased risk of suicide, says: "While SSRIs are used for the treatment of depression, they are known to be associated with a possible increased risk of suicidal thinking and behaviour in some children, adolescents and young adults."

The spokesman recommends monitoring patients for suicidality and unusual changes in behaviour, particularly at the start of treatment and when there are changes in dosage.

THE LAST MONTHS

Ms Lek says Zen started behaving uncharacteristically when he went back to Melbourne after being prescribed Lexapro on Sept 4. He ignored his parents' texts and calls,

went on a A\$500 (S\$480) online shopping spree and had erratic mood swings.

Although she believes that Lexapro tipped Zen over the edge, not everyone agrees.

Aurelia says that during the last few months of his life, Zen called her to talk about how he was feeling sad and at a loss.

Robert says that from the time he first knew Zen in February last year, Zen had expressed suicidal thoughts "on multiple occasions".

He tried different ways to help Zen. He asked Zen to call a suicide hotline. He knew that Zen had seen a psychiatrist. Once, when Zen asked what would be a good way to die, Robert joked: "Smoking will kill you in 20 years."

In late September, another friend

PHOTOS: GAVIN FOO, ISTOCKPHOTO

the paramedics arrived and took him to hospital.

Ms Lek cuddled her son as he convulsed with seizures on the hospital bed.

As he lay in the Intensive Care Unit for three days, she scrolled through his phone and found WhatsApp messages from Zen to a friend, saying he was "born to be sad". She had not known the extent of the distress he had kept from her.

She also found three WhatsApp messages he had sent before he killed himself, showing what he intended to do. The recipients did not or could not help him.

Ms Lek spoke to Zen one last time: "I thanked him for choosing me to be his mummy for the past 17 years and 11 months... I told him mummy forgives him and asked him to forgive me too. Tears were rolling down his cheeks and that night, he was brain dead."

On Oct 1, Zen died. His parents donated his organs to six recipients.

LIFE AFTER ZEN

Ms Lek has decided to let go of the anger she felt towards Zen's psychiatrist. She forgives the friends who could not help him, or who kept his condition secret, though she warns that professionals should be contacted as soon as possible for mental health issues.

She says: "You may think you are 'betraying' your friend's secret for five minutes, but you would be saving a life."

She wants peace.

On Jan 1, she and her family launched the Zen Dylan Koh Fund (giving.sg/limitless/zen), in partnership with non-profit organisation Limitless, to raise funds to counsel vulnerable youth.

Zen wanted to be a psychologist to help others who felt as sad as he did, she explains. "I want to honour the memory and legacy of my son, and my love for him," she says.

She had her first tattoos in memory of Zen on her forearms. When she holds herself, it feels as if he is comforting her, she says.

On his birthday, a month after he died, she wrote a letter to him asking for forgiveness for the genes she had passed to him. She has found out that eight relatives in her family tree had mental illness of some kind.

Every evening, she and her husband light a candle for Zen. They chat about him and talk to him.

"Even if we're travelling, we will light a candle for as long as we live," she says.

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Tapping technology, social media to spread mental wellness efforts

What does it mean to "like" an image of self-harm online?

Ms Elaine Lek, 54, was distressed to find that a few followers had "liked" her son Zen Dylan Koh's self-harm posts on an Instagram account that he kept private. He had more than 30 followers, some of whom even commented that they hoped to join him.

Zen, 17, killed himself last year.

But a friend of Zen's, 18-year-old Aurelia (not her real name) defends her decision to "like" his posts.

"I wanted him to know I had seen what he posted and that I acknowledged the struggles he was going through. It wasn't as if I was approving what he did," she says.

After seeing such images on his Instagram account, she would text or call him to find out how he was doing. Such conflicting interpretations are an example of how social media can be a double-edged sword when it comes to mental health challenges.

Early this month, photo-sharing platform Instagram announced it would ban all graphic self-harm images in response to the suicide of a British teenager. Some critics hailed the move, but said it was years overdue.

After the 14-year-old's death, her family found material on her account relating to depression and suicide. The girl's father said he believed Instagram was partly to blame for her suicide, which sparked public anger.

Conversely, the popularity of social media makes it a feasible platform for mental health campaigns targeting the young. In September, suicide prevention agency Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) launched an Instagram campaign, #ThroughTheNight, to encourage people to send messages of hope to those feeling low between the hours of midnight and 3am.

Over the last few years, SOS has seen an increase in the number of calls during those hours from adolescents aged between 10 and 19, she says.

Ms Wong Lai Chun, its senior assistant director. SOS statistics show that those in this age range made 261 such calls in the year from April 2017 to March 2018, a rise of nearly 80 per cent from 147 in the previous corresponding period.

Ms Wong says #ThroughTheNight saw hundreds of posts using the hashtag. The campaign was part of Suicide Prevention Awareness Week from Sept 10 to 16 last year.

The use of social media for mental wellness extends to mental health chatbot apps such as Wysa and Woebot.

Powered by artificial intelligence (AI), these apps incorporate tools such as cognitive behavioural therapy, which is used to treat anxiety and depression.

At a psychiatry conference here in January, Wysa co-founder Ramakant Vempati said the app, released in 2016, had one million users worldwide. He attributed its rapid growth to a strong demand of mental health needs and the anonymity granted by the app.

Clinical psychologist Lilian Ing, who works at Fernhill Consultancy, says the confluence of technology and anonymity is attractive to young people seeking help for mental health issues.

"In my experience, young people seek anonymity in Singapore due to the stigma attached to mental illness... Because of the influence of social media, I believe young people are more likely to seek technological support if they do not have a friend whom they trust to turn to."

However, she cautions against wholesale reliance on AI, suggesting that a "blended approach" is best. "Technology provides the screening and self-help learning and people can provide the more complex support that AI cannot. There is no substitute for a warm, caring voice or presence. Let machines do what they do best and people do what they do best. We can work together," she says.

Getting help

Ms Wong Lai Chun, senior assistant director of suicide prevention agency Samaritans of Singapore (SOS), shares some tips on how to be more aware of suicidal behaviour and how to help prevent it.

Warning signs

Suicide warning signs can be classified broadly into three categories:

1 TALK

Persons at risk may say things such as:

- "My family will be better off without me."
- "My life is meaningless anyway."
- "If you don't love me, I'll kill myself."

2 ACTIONS

They may give away treasured possessions and say goodbye to people around them.

They may research suicide methods or write suicide notes, including e-mails, diaries or blogs.

3 MOOD

They may display emotional outbursts showing anger, sadness, irritability or recklessness.

They may lose interest in things they may ordinarily be interested in, and express feelings of humiliation or anxiety.

How to help

- Asking someone if he wants to end his life does not increase the likelihood of it happening. It lets the individual know that he can talk about suicide and express his feelings freely.
- If you know of someone who is contemplating suicide, express your concern and talk to him in a caring and non-judgmental way.
- Loved ones may wish to suggest to individuals in crisis to approach professional support resources or accompany them to make an appointment if necessary.
- If someone does not wish to seek help, concerned third parties may ask for his consent to be referred to SOS. Third-party referrals can be made through the 24-hour SOS Hotline (1800-221-4444) and E-mail Befriending service (pat@sos.org.sg).
- When someone is in imminent danger due to a suicide crisis, call 995 for an ambulance or accompany the individual to the A&E department of the nearest local hospital immediately.

Helplines to call

- **Samaritans of Singapore:** 1800-221-4444 (24 hours)
- **Mental Health Helpline:** 6389-2222 (24 hours)
- **Singapore Association for Mental Health:** 1800-383-7019
- **Tinkle Friend (for primary school-aged children):** 1800-274-4788
- **Care Corner Counselling Hotline (Mandarin):** 1800-353-5800

Suicide is preventable, say experts

Most teenagers who kill themselves are male, says psychiatrist John Wong of National University Hospital (NUH).

The demography of teen suicide is recognised as male preponderance," says Associate Professor Wong, head and senior consultant at NUH's department of psychological medicine.

Other characteristics of this demographic include an association with underlying depression or an anxiety disorder, he adds.

While more males die by suicide in this age group in general, more females than males approach suicide prevention agency Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) for support.

SOS' senior assistant director Wong Lai Chun says: "We see more females coming forward to seek emotional support through our 24-hour hotline or e-mail befriending services. However, this trend is not specific to youth and can be observed across most age groups for both services."

She attributes the differences to different coping strategies.

"Women tend to communicate with their family and friends when they are in distress. They are also becoming more aware of the avenues to seek help over the past decade," she says.

"Men, however, often find it difficult to talk about their struggles or express the pain they are feeling inside."

In Singapore, adolescent suicide reached a peak of 27 such deaths in 2015, the highest in 15 years.

This figure, which refers to persons aged between 10 and 19, has declined in recent years. In 2016, adolescent suicides numbered 22, and the latest figure was 12 in 2017.

"Singaporean adolescents who attempted suicide, with the intent of ending their lives, reported significantly higher stressors in the domains of social, family, academic and financial matters, compared with matched controls," says Prof Wong.

Suicide is preventable, mental health professionals say.

Dr Ong Say How, senior consultant and chief at the department of developmental psychiatry at the Institute of Mental Health, says most people contemplating suicide tend to be "ambivalent" about their thoughts. He says: "Most people have mixed feelings about committing suicide. Certain thoughts may trigger the idea of ending their life while they also have a list of reasons to stay alive."

"Therefore, very often, the support of friends and family can help reel the person back in by constantly reminding him about the reasons for living while the other problems are being sorted out."



Small bonsai, big prices

Theses artificially dwarfed trees carry hefty price tags for their carefully cultivated shapes, which are seen as an art form



Benson Ang
Lifestyle Correspondent

With its artfully gnarled trunk and meticulous balance of deadwood, leaves and branches, a bonsai plant is often seen as a symbol of calm, harmony and peaceful energy.

The older and more sinewy the bonsai, the higher the asking price.

But soaring five-figure price tags and fresh demand for these miniaturised trees has created big problems.

It has also broken the peace long exuded by the bonsai. A recent spate of high-profile thefts has cast the spotlight on the security of these artificially dwarfed trees.

In the last two months, a team of bonsai thieves reportedly stole US\$118,000 (\$S160,000) worth of ornamental bonsai from a family's garden outside Tokyo, Japan.

In a heartfelt plea, the grief-stricken owners, likening the trees to their children, implored the thieves to remember to water them.

Last weekend, burglars made off with more than A\$22,000 (\$S21,000) worth of bonsai plants, as well as wire and tools from a nursery in Darwin, Australia.

Singapore itself is no stranger to bonsai crimes. In 1980, 15 bonsai plants were looted from a nursery in Dunearn Road.

Five years later, a youth and two friends stole six pots of bonsai plants from flats in Hougang.

And in 2015, an amateur horticulturist reportedly helped himself to nine bonsai plants worth a total of \$12,400 from homes and community gardens in Jurong. He was jailed for one year.

But these cases might just be the tip of the iceberg.

A veteran bonsai artist from Boh Bonsai Singapore told The Sunday Times that he has had more than 50 bonsai plants stolen from him – on about 10 occasions – since the 1980s.

Mr Boh Twang Keng, 64, estimates some of the stolen plants were more than 30 years old and worth more than \$1,000 each.

Yet, the Singaporean, who has been cultivating bonsai for more than 50 years and first encountered bonsai thieves in the 1980s, has made only a couple of police reports about the thefts.

He says in Mandarin: "I am very zen about such things. I don't want to go through the hassle of making a police report and assisting with investigations. If the thieves kept my plants, they have to live with the guilt of their crime."

"If they sold the bonsai, then I take it that they needed the money, so I was helping them with their financial difficulties."

When he did make some police reports in the 1980s, he said the culprits, who were later arrested, turned out to be regulars who frequented his nursery.

"Seeing them put behind bars did not make me feel good. I decided not to make police reports after that because I want my hobby to be associated with positive feelings."

The pilfering of bonsai plants continued on a few occasions in the 2010s.

Then, he operated his nursery on the premises of a Pasir Ris pet farm, which closed at 10pm nightly. He left at around 7pm each day and believes the thieves struck after midnight.

"There were no security measures," he said. "And identifying the culprits from the closed-circuit television footage was difficult because it was so dark."

In those days, some people also "shoplifted" small pots of bonsai in broad daylight, he says.

"The plants just disappear and I believe they were taken by prospective 'customers'. To be honest, I feel a little betrayed because I would answer their questions hoping they would buy the bonsai, not knowing they planned to steal the plants."

He now operates his business from his bungalow in Lengkok Mariam.

Most recently, in December, four pricey bonsai plants were removed from his garden.

One had a price tag of \$1,600 and the other, \$1,200. Once again, he did not report the theft.

"I am not calculative," he says with a shrug.

As a security measure, he now keeps about 500 of his most beloved plants – including junipers, wrightias and Chinese elms – within his bungalow, displayed on wooden stands.

They are mostly imported from Taiwan, Japan, China, Malaysia and Indonesia and are under 24-hour CCTV surveillance.

His most expensive bonsai is a dragon-shaped *prema obtusifolia*, for which he was once offered \$10,000.

But Mr Boh will part with it only for \$20,000.

"I think it is worth more," he says. "I bought this beauty in Malaysia in 2007 for \$500. But I have spent more than a decade shaping and looking after it."

Meanwhile, the plants at another nursery, Bonsai Gallery, which was founded in 2005 and is located off Sembawang Road, are now under CCTV surveillance.

They are protected by a tall fence.

Its director, Mr Jack Lee, 43, says: "To be honest, I don't think any other security measures are practical. If we use barb wire, or any deterrent features, we might



Mr Eddy Elias Teo, owner of Jia Bonsai Singapore, with his bonsai plants at his landed property in Upper Thomson.
ST PHOTO: JOSEPH CHUA



Rugby fans at the HSBC Singapore Rugby Sevens. PHOTO: SINGAPORE SPORTS HUB

Tackle some fun at HSBC's exclusive premium rugby suite

Desiree Loh

Rugby fans will get a chance to rub shoulders with legends of the sport – including the likes of DJ Forbes, George Gregan and Waialeale Serevi – if they are patrons of the HSBC Singapore Rugby Sevens' exclusive premium shared suite.

The fourth edition of the sporting event will run on April 13 and 14 at the National Stadium.

The corporate hospitality suite, called The Greenyards Club, is open to corporate guests and VIPs, who will be able to snap pictures with the sportsmen, enjoy a question-and-answer session with them and gain more insight into the game.

These are but some of the perks offered at the suite, which costs \$1,100 a person for two days.

Spokesman Adam Firth, chief commercial officer of Singapore Sports Hub, said: "We're looking to dial up the inclusion of entertainment offerings and we also want guests to have a premium experience."

At The Greenyards Club, patrons will also be treated to a premium buffet spread, an all-day beverage package that includes premium beer, wine and soft drinks, and the chance to mingle with characters such as Poppy and Branch from the

2016 DreamWorks animated movie Trolls.

For those looking for a more private viewing experience, open-air box suites are also available on the third-level concourse of the National Stadium. A box suite for 36 guests costs \$990 a person for two days, and one for 72 guests is \$950 a person for two days.

Besides these private hospitality experiences, there will also be a huge entertainment line-up for all spectators to enjoy. Acts like American rock band Smash Mouth and the band from the original cast of the Broadway musical Rock Of Ages are set to rock the stage.

"These performances are for everyone who comes to the event. We're looking for music that's high energy and allows everyone to participate," said Mr Firth.

"Rugby Sevens as an event is very much about fan participation. We chose music that the fans can sing along to and add to the party vibe."

Families will not be left out – there will be a dedicated kids' zone that includes all-day screenings of animated television series such as Trolls: The Beat Goes On! and Dragons: Race To The Edge.

"We want people to get into the spirit of the event and engage with one another in a family-friendly way. We want this to be a party, but a party that you can also take your kids to," said Mr Firth.

BOOK IT / HSBC SINGAPORE RUGBY SEVENS

WHERE: National Stadium And Singapore Sports Hub, 1 Stadium Drive

WHEN: April 13 and 14

ADMISSION: Family and early-bird discounts are available, from \$19 for youth and \$29 for adults, until Thursday at www.sportshubtx.sg. To book a corporate suite, e-mail hospitality@singapore7s.sg

INFO: www.singapore7s.sg

Cultivating bonsai is like grooming a person

After 20 years of grooming talent in the entertainment business, music producer Eddy Elias Teo, 47, turned his attention to nature.

The Singaporean picked up bonsai cultivation about 10 years ago, during which time he took many years to create. If you can pay five figures for an art piece, why not a bonsai?

He also started Jia Bonsai Singapore – "Jia" is derived from the Chinese and Japanese word for "house" – two years ago at home, where he sells some bonsai pieces to friends and hobbyists.

When their plants need a trim or a new pot, he is happy to help them for free, in a 3m-tall air-conditioned workshop room – filled with various tools, wires and pots of every shape and size – created especially for his bonsai hobby.

This pastime can take up to 10 hours a day.

In addition, he started three WhatsApp chat groups to share photographs and tips on bonsai cultivation, as well as inform fellow enthusiasts of new arrivals in his collection and in other bonsai nurseries.

To safeguard the bonsai, he has a few CCTV systems monitoring his garden, which is brightly lit at night.

He says: "It also helps that my neighbours have big dogs that bark whenever a stranger approaches." So far, he has not encountered any thefts. But should the day come, what will he do?

"It depends," he says. "If it is an expensive bonsai, I will try to track down the culprit, which is easy to do because the community is so small."

"But if it is a cheap bonsai, I probably won't bother."

His oldest, and most expensive, bonsai is a 200-year-old informal upright *yamadori* juniper, which he bought last year for a five-figure sum.

All are imported from Japan, which the Japanophile visits eight times a year.

His oldest, and most expensive, bonsai is a 200-year-old informal upright *yamadori* juniper, which he bought last year for a five-figure sum.

What is bonsai?

Bonsai, a Japanese term meaning "plantings in a pot", is considered both a hobby and an art form.

Widely believed to have originated in China under the name "penjing", meaning "tray scenery", it reportedly spread to Japan in the eighth century, where it evolved and became known as "bonsai".

Several plant species, such as junipers and black pine, can be cultivated as bonsai. Like works of art, their value is in the eye of the beholder. Prices start at \$15 and, reportedly, the most expensive bonsai here is believed to be a dragon-shaped *prema obtusifolia* with an asking price of \$20,000.

If you are new to bonsai, Mr Jack Lee, 43, director of Bonsai Gallery, has the following advice on cultivating these miniature ornamental trees:

1. Select a species suited to Singapore's hot and humid climate. For instance, *wrightia religiosa* – better known by its Chinese name "shui mei" – is tropical and is among the more common species cultivated as bonsai here.

2. Give it plenty of sunlight. Bonsai generally do not cope well indoors. If the plant gets sunlight from just one direction, rotate it every two weeks so that it grows evenly.

3. Water the plant once a day in the evening, using either tap, filtered or mineral water. Avoid watering during very hot weather, as the water in the soil could heat up and "cook" the plant roots.

4. Shape the plant by directing its growth. This can be done by wrapping copper or aluminium wires around the branches and bending the branches gently. Let the plant adapt for a week or two between each bending session.

5. Prune the bonsai every month using sharp household scissors.

6. Repot the plants every two years, using fresh top soil from a nursery.



ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

create an environment that is not welcoming. "If we use alarms, it might not work, as most bonsai theft jobs are done very quickly. By the time we drive back to the nursery, the thieves would be gone."

Thieves determined to steal bonsai will probably be able to do so because most nurseries operate in large open spaces, where roaming around freely and browsing is encouraged, he adds.

"But what is the point? Once they try to sell their ill-gotten gains, it is very easy for professionals to trace the plants back to them."

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I am very zen about such things. If the thieves kept my plants, they have to live with the guilt of their crime.



VETERAN BONSAI ENTHUSIAST BOH TWANG KENG (above) on people who stole bonsai from him. He says some of the plants stolen were more than 30 years old and worth more than \$1,000 each

ST
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The wistful weight of distance

For those of us with families far away, the best gifts are not perfumes and shirts but presence



Rohit Brijnath

My father is unwell in India but I can't hold his hand. I see him on the phone, beard slightly untidy, under his blanket, thin smile trying to kindle worn face, and I get that familiar ache of the migrant. The wistful weight of distance.

To live away from home – or what was once home – is mostly a choice and to journey is often a privilege, and yet, distance has its own tyranny and, in effect, we live two lives. One here, the other in another time zone, divided by seas which we mentally sail every day. Every migrant knows the fastest way home.

Still, I am lucky. I can fly to my parents in India – or to my daughter in Australia and my brothers in Dubai and England – any time but the Bangladeshi man trimming leaves can't and neither can Vanessa. She is a foreign domestic worker, a single mother who left behind a mother, sister and two sons, aged 10 and 11, in the Philippines.

There is no Wi-Fi where they live, only data, and it makes for a rationed affection. It's enough for three or four phone calls a week but maybe only a monthly video call and it must be used for love and discipline. She left her family when her youngest son was nine months old and she is saving to build a house for them. Sometimes, you must go far, for long, to find bricks.

Vanessa and I are distant voyaging cousins of a sort, both of

us wanderers joined by a single truth: We know distance and its many measurements, in kilometres and in longing. In the beginning, as Ellis tells a young immigrant in the 2015 movie *Brooklyn*, "You'll feel so homesick that you'll want to die", and then in a new land, you take root, you learn, you cope, you belong, you don't want to leave.

We journey from our families in search of opportunity, love, safety, the better life, adventure, education. In late 1989, my friend, Susan, left the Philippines for Dubai at 22 because her father was unwell and no one else was earning and she says with an accountant's transparency: "To help my family, I had to leave my family." Distance was her deliverance.

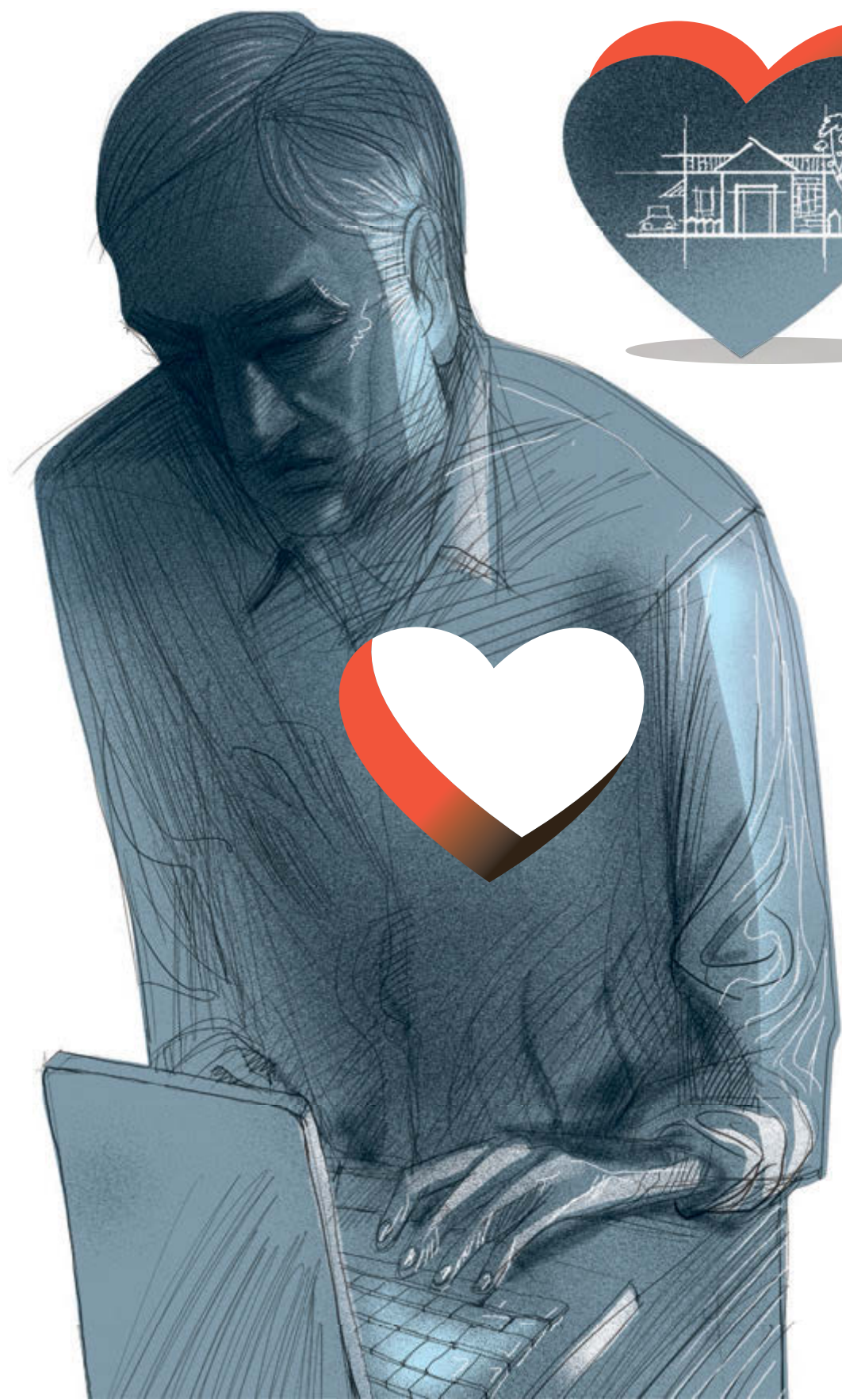
She wrote letters, couldn't afford phone calls, but spoke into cassettes occasionally and posted them home. Nothing reassures like the human sound. Single-handedly, she educated her four sisters and brother and if she is a lovely, happy, balanced woman, then distance once left her with a small scar of loss. Back then, after a few months in Dubai, her boyfriend wrote to her: Sorry, he had met another girl.

To live at a distance is to make a deal. To forge ahead is to agree to leave things behind: family gatherings, church with grandma, the smells of an old kitchen, the scent of the past. All the things you take for granted. To stitch a new life is to first cut old threads.

We travel to build futures, and yet, we carry crumbs of the past – recipe books, picture frames, a mother's dinner set, a father's tie. Somehow, we don't want to ever be completely adrift and every object eventually represents the same thing: a reminder of the full story of us.

Distance is enriching and to live in Australia and Singapore has taught me how to wash dishes, be independent, appreciate footy, admire work ethic, use a wrench and swear by curry puffs. It introduced me to writers, Aboriginal history, Chinese festivals and ideas; it told me that no culture is superior but only different, flawed, fascinating and to be learnt from; it reaffirmed that behind our varied colours, shapes, accents is nothing but human beings.

Distance, as my friend Devika – who moved here from Kolkata 25 years ago – pointed out, offers us a different lens. It lets us see ageing



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

better for we see new lines on older faces as we open the gate back home. It reminds us that the best gifts aren't perfumes and shirts but simply presence. It tells us, in a single lunch in our mother's house, about the easy strength of family. It explains to us about the deep tissue of guilt.

And yet, we are fortunate, for we have e-mail, WhatsApp, FaceTime, all the tools to shrink distance and so we rarely suffer the wounds of waiting, the loneliness that comes as a letter shuffles slowly across a globe, or the pain of a postman offering a telegram that often promises a condensed version of a sad tale.

Still, people managed in older times, scribbling love even in the folds of aerogrammes, writing in remote forests and sending mail via runners, sitting in tents in minus 40 deg C cold with death closing in and writing letters as the explorer Robert Falcon Scott did.

To read the letters of ancient immigrants is to feel the undercurrent of distance, as love and misery, inked on pages, make a slow trek back home in the holds of ships. On the Johnstown Area Heritage Association website,

there is a letter from Maker Kroneski of Schenectaday, who writes to his mother in Poland in 1891 of the poverty before him: "It would have been better if I had gotten lost; it would have been better if I had drowned at sea; that is how it is in America."

But now, distance is compressed and, with my father, I know immediately, his sodium and sugar readings, all of it transmitted via a WhatsApp group to Dubai, England, Singapore, Australia, all of us electronically holding one another's hands. Somehow, we defeat distance.

We do it through jokes so feeble that living away from my brothers seems a sound decision. Still, it's something, isn't it, all of us divided by borders but joined by a giggle. We do it through constant contact and by speaking the truth, through declarations of love and daughters lectured on video, through kisses blown to dismissive granddaughters and by reading the nuance in one another's phrases.

And we do it through faith.

Last week, I stumbled across The Digitizing Immigrant Letters Project at the University of Minnesota and read the story of

Italians Antonietta Petris and Loris Palma.

They met in 1946 in Ampezzo Carnico, where she lived, and when he returned to Venice, they wrote daily. In 1948, on the understanding that Loris would follow, Antonietta immigrated to Montreal to join her father. Love often dims over distance but not for Loris, who wrote to her in September, 1948: "...There is now nearly half a world that keep us apart; but our thoughts and our promises will be maintained and transported, renewed and rechannelled into our hearts across the tides of an ocean that has no boundaries for our willpower."

He was right. In 1949, Loris went to Canada, they were married and remained a couple till he died in 2007.

It's not hard to imagine the moment they were united for you can see it still, on any day, at almost any major airport. It is the hug of the separated which every migrant knows. The one where no one wants to let go. Because when bodies touch, distance briefly dies.

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The twist in my sobriety? I am now a terrible guest

Ann Bauer

One cold November night, my husband and I arranged to get together with a couple we adore.

The plan was to meet at their house for appetisers and drinks. Betsy would be there when we arrived. Mark was due home at 7pm, when we would walk to a restaurant down the street.

We rang their bell at 6pm.

As usual, Betsy had prepared a generous spread of food as well as an array of wine: a sauvignon blanc from New Zealand, a dark malbec and a pretty peach-coloured rose.

John pulled out a bottle each of club soda and grapefruit juice and Betsy's face fell.

"Oh, are you guys still not drinking?" she asked.

Despite my husband's cheer, I was on her side. Our nearly three-month experiment with abstinence had improved our health, sleep, mood and marriage.

But socially? It had made us one big, collective drag.

We quit because of me. At 51, I was suffering from a mean and

constant perimenopause. Insomnia, depression, fatigue, heartburn, body aches, skin problems, itching.

I had tried everything: hormones, herbs, soya, magnesium and acupuncture. Then, a one-week trial of not drinking confirmed what I had feared. Without alcohol, everything got better.

Indigestion? Gone. Sleep? Vastly improved. Skin? Amazingly clear and better hydrated. Mood? Stable and light.

I stopped drinking in late August. My sweet husband gave it up two weeks later.

"Go ahead. You can drink without me," I told him. But he shook his head.

"It isn't fun anymore," John said. I worried he would get resentful. But it didn't happen. Instead, he lost 8kg, stopped snoring, began studying a foreign language and reduced his intake of reflux and blood-pressure drugs.

We are not purists. John often has a single drink at a business function because it's easier than explaining why he doesn't drink.

I had a glass of champagne at a friend's bachelorette party.

We each drank one perfect glass of pinot noir on our anniversary.

But we are not tempted to fall back into old patterns because giving up daily drinking has improved nearly every area of our lives and the days we don't drink just feel so good.

So, what's the story? Blissful as we may be in our 97 per cent sobriety, who cares? Well, our friends do. Because we are now terrible guests.

Let's go back to the night of that casual dinner. We ate a bit and chatted for an hour about work, kids and ageing parents. Around 7.05pm, Betsy checked her phone.

"Oh, shoot, turns out one of us got the time wrong," she said. "I guess Mark won't be home until 8pm."

She went to the kitchen to pour herself another glass of wine and John and I shot each other alarmed looks.

The house was cool – the way we used to keep ours – but this was Minnesota. Without the flush of alcohol, we were freezing.

Our glasses held only mushy pink-tinged ice. We also were starving, but knew from experience that our capacity to eat had shrunk.

One more helping of cheese and olives would make us useless by dinnertime.

When Betsy returned, she took one look at us, our wan faces and stony resolve.

"I'm really sorry about this, guys," she said, looking miserable. "I don't know what happened. I must have read his calendar wrong."

Which is unacceptable. Because at any time before this in the multi-year history of our friendship with Betsy and Mark, we would have shrugged off the delay and held out our glasses. She was not responsible for the fact that John and I had changed.

I wish I could say we rallied, that I asked for cups of hot tea with honey and entertained Betsy and my husband with some amusing anecdote from work.

Instead, I sat shivering and picking at a cracker until Mark walked in at 8.15pm. Then, we grabbed our coats and walked through an unfortunate sleet to the restaurant, where blessedly, we were served within 15 minutes. With the first few bites of real food, I felt life return.

Then, John and I went home and

rehashed the no-alcohol decision. Should the world have to deal with us sober?

If Mark and Betsy were our only drinking friends, we would drink with them, once or twice a month, and the rest of the time, we would live our clean, club-soda life.

But we are surrounded by wonderful, warm people who drink often and hard. My career is in advertising, so I have cultivated folk who get their juices running with a Bloody Mary at 10am. John is from a family that buys whiskey by the handle.

We love our festive, storytelling, always-up-for-a-celebration crowd. If we drank with all our friends and relations who do, we would quickly be back to old habits.

I would be the cranky, queasy, dry-mouthed, hormonally added menopausal mess I was before.

So, the answer, we decided, is that the responsibility lies with us. We have to be flexible, good-natured and better prepared.

One fix is to invite people to our place instead of going to theirs: We can make sure there's alcohol on hand, but also plenty of non-alcoholic options for us.

We also started talking to friends more about why we weren't drinking.

I was so depressed before, and now, I'm not. I am able to sleep for the first time in years. This is not a moral decision. It is a medical one, like my husband's decision to avoid shellfish because the iodine can make his throat swell shut.

I am not recommending that everyone stop drinking or saying abstinence is a panacea for menopause. We're still a little awkward at parties. And we're prone to go to bed at 10pm.

It is simply a reminder – mostly to myself – that friends are not responsible for accommodating your lifestyle decisions.

Their understanding is nice.

But ideally, you make your personal choices, carry them out with confidence and try not to disrupt the small pleasures of the people around you.

When everyone is sitting around the table, it doesn't matter what's inside the glass in your hand.

WASHINGTON POST

• The writer is an American novelist and essayist.

Successful ageing



From left: Mrs Chan, Mr Chan and PCS befriender coordinator Chia Hang Sing with Mr and Mrs Tan. PHOTO: JAC WOO

Friends you can count on

Mr and Mrs Walter Chan volunteer as community befrienders to lend a sympathetic ear to lonely seniors

Jac Woo

While some teenagers preferred to hang out with friends during their free time, 17-year-old Walter Chan Yee Cheong would volunteer his time and effort to help the needy.

Now 56, Mr Chan has been actively involved in various types of volunteer work since then.

He recalls: "I started doing volunteer work in 1980 by giving free tuition and organising activities for children of low-income families."

A HEART FOR THE ELDERLY

"In 2017, I came to know about the Presbyterian Community Services (PCS) Community Befriending Programme when my church requested for volunteers," says Mr Chan, a private-hire car driver.

The programme is an initiative that connects befrienders with socially isolated seniors to provide regular companionship and emotional support.

"I wanted to help because I know many seniors are living alone and I feel for them, especially when I hear stories of those not being cared for by their children," he says.

He encouraged his wife, Ms Tan Bee Lian, 53, an insurance agent, to volunteer as community befrienders together.

"To my delight, she agreed without a second thought," he says.

PATIENCE AND PASSION MATTER

As parents of three children in their 20s, Mr and Mrs Chan are glad they have flexible working hours that enable them to visit their befriendees on weekdays, when the seniors

I wanted to help because I know many seniors are living alone and I feel for them, especially when I hear stories of those not being cared for by their children.

MR WALTER CHAN YEE CHEONG, BEFRIENDER

are mainly alone and need someone to talk to.

The couple currently has four befriendees, whom they call and visit twice a month.

The befriendees include patients who need someone to follow up on their recovery condition after being discharged from the hospital.

One of them is Mr Tan Cheng Aun, 64, who has dementia and is unable to walk properly after a fall in the toilet.

In September 2017, the Chans, together with a PCS befriender coordinator, visited Mr Tan and his wife at their home.

Mr Chan recalls: "Our first visit was actually quite unpleasant because Mr Tan felt very uneasy and showed signs of resistance, as he thought we wanted to sell him things or had ill intentions.

"Although he softened after our explanation, he was still very quiet during our first two visits.

"After a few more visits, we were able to break the ice with our sincerity. Gradually, he opened up and treated us as friends, and even started to joke with us.

"Three months later, he saw us as family and would always tell us to help ourselves to the drinks in his kitchen."

TOUCHING AND CHANGING LIVES

With help from the Chans, the Tans managed to find new friends and lead a more active social life.

Initially, Mr Tan did not like to go outdoors. His wife was concerned that he would suffer from depression if he kept sitting at home.

With the Chans' constant encouragement, he eventually started to go out more in his electric wheelchair, accompanied by his wife.

The Chans also invited the Tans to join the Tembusu Senior Activity Centre nearby, where Mr Tan discovered the fun of drumming and singing with other seniors.

Mr Chan says: "Last year, we invited them and other befriendees to a lunch organised by PCS at a Chinese restaurant.

"Both of them enjoyed it very much. They were grateful for the opportunity to join us and thankful for the befrienders who provided transport for them."

JUST LIKE FAMILY

The joy on the faces of the people they help makes it all worth the effort of being a befriender, says Mr Chan.

"Some of the elderly women we visit remind me of my late mother, thus I treat them like my parents. They are always very eager to meet us and will call and ask, 'Are you coming to see me soon?'

"When we see the happiness in them, it makes us happy as well," he adds.

This series is an initiative under the Action Plan for Successful Ageing.

HELP SENIORS FEEL LESS LONELY

The Community Befriending Programme is run by 17 community organisations in Singapore, including Fei Yue Community Services, Presbyterian Community Services, St Hilda's Community Services Centre and Thyee Hua Kwan Moral Charities.

To be a befriender, sign up at www.moh.gov.sg/befriendasenior, or call the Singapore Silver Line on 1800-650-6060 (Monday to Friday: 8.30am to 8.30pm, or Saturday: 8.30am to 4pm. Closed on Sundays and public holidays.)

I feel young when I make new friends!



Community Befriending Programme

Drink kopi, share some laughs, make a friend.

- 1 Be their friend**
Connect with seniors in your neighbourhood, start enduring friendships.
- 2 Be their eyes and ears**
Listen to their problems and lend them a helping hand.
- 3 Be fulfilled**
When you help someone, it makes you feel good too.

Sign up at www.moh.gov.sg/befriendasenior or call the Singapore Silver Line at 1800 650 6060* today.

*Monday to Friday: 8.30am to 8.30pm or Saturday: 8.30am to 4pm except public holidays.



Tots take on YouTube

Catch Singapore's young YouTube stars on Playtime TV, Shan And Shaista Show and Kandie Family



Eddino Abdul Hadi

Like many kids around her age, seven-year-old Cindy loves playing with slime toys and games like Jenga.

But while most of them play in privacy, Cindy's playtime is filmed and watched by thousands of strangers on YouTube.

Cindy, whose surname is withheld to protect her privacy, is the star of Playtime TV, a local YouTube channel that has accumulated more than one million views since it started putting up videos six months ago.

Last year, the channel – which has more than 28,400 subscribers and clocks an average of 197,900 views a video – was on YouTube's Top 5 Rising Creators In Singapore list.

Like a lot of YouTube videos hosted by kids and aimed at other children, the clips feature her playing with toys, games such as Pie Face, and taking part in activities such as learning to make sushi and exploring places such as indoor theme park KidZania Singapore.

YouTube videos of children's playtime are serious business.

Forbes magazine listed a seven-year-old, Ryan, as the highest-paid YouTube star last year, having earned US\$22 million (S\$29.8 million) that year through sponsorship, endorsement deals and

advertising revenue.

His videos feature him doing what most kids love – unboxing toys, playing with them, talking about them and being his usual cute self while doing those things.

No Singaporean YouTube kid stars appear on the same Forbes list. But apart from Playtime TV, there are a couple of other local channels featuring kids at play that are pulling in views – Kandie Family and the Shan And Shaista Show (see stories below).

YouTube, which is owned by technology giant Google, does not allow minors (the minimum age ranges from 13 to 16, depending on the country) to create their own channels, so these are owned and managed by adults.

Playtime TV is the brainchild of popular local YouTube personality Jianhao Tan, who co-hosts the channel with Cindy. Kandie Family is run by celebrity acting couple Andie Chen and Kate Pang, while the Shan And Shaista Show features the children of actress and host Nurul Aini.

Playtime TV is one of the many channels run by Titan Digital Media, of which Tan, 25, is the chief executive officer. Cindy, who is his friend's daughter and his goddaughter, was groomed by Titan's Academy, the company's training arm that aims to nurture a new generation of YouTube personalities and content creators.

Tan has always been aware of Cindy's charm and charisma, recalling an occasion last year when he saw her spontaneously break out impressive dance moves at a restaurant.

Says Tan, whose personal channel has more than 2.7 million subscribers: "I was impressed, but the thought of having her in my videos never came to mind. It was only until we spent more time together and built a bond that I felt we could do something fun and special together."

"She also always asked about being in my videos as she is very



Local YouTube personality Jianhao Tan with his Playtime TV co-host Cindy and dog BunCha, an Instagram star with more than 87,000 followers.
ST PHOTO: SAHIBA CHAUDHARY

fascinated every time she sees me on the set of my videos."

To date, Playtime TV has put out nine videos. Filming sessions, each of which last about three hours, take place every other Monday.

Cindy is waiting to be enrolled in an international school here later this year, after which filming sessions are likely to be moved to weekends.

Tan and his producers come up with ideas on what they want to do in each video, but Cindy's actions and dialogue are largely spontaneous and unscripted.

The girl, who sometimes makes

cameos in Titan's other channels, has already had real-world experience with fans who watch her videos.

Last December, she took part in a meet-and-greet session with Tan and other popular local influencers and had fans queueing up for photos and autographs all day long.

Tan declines to reveal Cindy's YouTube earnings, but says she is not paid for non-endorsed videos. The money from endorsements will be paid to her parents.

The popularity of these kid videos is a sign of the growing pool of local content creators, says Mr Marc

Lefkowitz, YouTube APAC's head of creator and artist development.

He adds: "We are committed to building YouTube as well as YouTube Kids as a trusted platform to ensure a responsible and conducive space that will allow generations of YouTubers to create enriching content and audiences to learn."

Still, experts caution against over-exposing children online and stress the need for adequate adult supervision.

Singapore Management University sociology professor Paulin Straughan says: "With minors,

because they are so young, we have to be careful when they are on a public platform. The minute you put yourself out there on social media, you can never take it back."

"I think parents should be aware that it is not the best way to showcase their child's talents and children should be taught that while the Internet is an amazing space for learning and exploration, it is probably one of the most dangerous spaces we have. Once they are on the Internet, they have little sight of who or what they are interacting with."

dinohadi@sph.com.sg



Cindy and Jianhao Tan in a Pie Face showdown. PHOTOS: YOUTUBE

PLAYTIME TV

bit.ly/2XhqyzN

Started: September last year
Subscribers: More than 28,400
Total views: More than 1.7 million

Top Singapore YouTuber Jianhao Tan, 25, and seven-year-old Cindy host Playtime TV, a channel that includes toy reviews. One episode, for example, features the duo playing with different types of Jenga, the block stacking game.

There are also videos featuring Cindy picking up a new skill, such as one where she learns to make simple and healthy breakfast meals.

Not all videos are filmed in the studio.

The channel's most popular video is one where she explores indoor theme park KidZania Singapore. The 10-minute video has clocked more than 600,000 views.

She also goes up against Tan in a "kids vs adults challenge" series. One episode has them trying to outdo each other making sushi out of Play-Doh.

Cindy also makes cameos in other channels, such as gaming channel Notgood Gamers, which, like Playtime TV, are under influencer company Titan Digital Media's banner. A recent video shows her playing online multi-player game PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds.



Actress-host Kate Pang making healthy chicken strips with her children Aden (left) and Avery.

KANDIE FAMILY

bit.ly/lydEE2N

Started: August 2014
Subscribers: More than 24,400
Total views: More than 4.4 million

Actor Andie Chen, 33, and actress-host Kate Pang, 35, have always wanted their YouTube channel to be about family, so it was only natural that their two children – four-year-old son Aden and two-year-old daughter Avery – would feature prominently in their videos.

The Mandarin channel includes a series that puts the two kids front and centre – Pillowtalk Mini, where the siblings discuss topics ranging from environmental awareness to seasonal holidays such as Christmas and Halloween.

Another series, Kandelicious, has the whole family whipping up meals together.

Chen and Pang, who left Mediagroup in late 2017 to focus on Kandie Family, ensure the videos

featuring Aden and Avery have educational value.

Chen says: "Our mantra is that we don't want to do something that has no value or just pure entertainment value. We want to have a discussion going on, we try to have a message for all the content that we make."

Getting their children in their videos is also a way for the family to bond, he adds.

"I'm quite a workaholic and my wife is always busy. We wanted to have some work that involves the whole family, so we can actually be together while we are working."

He declines to reveal how much the children earn through their video appearances, but money from endorsements of brands such as financial services company Mastercard and household brand Scotch-Brite is mostly saved in the kids' bank accounts, with a little given to them for their piggy banks.



Siblings Shaista Eman (left) and Shan Ehan playing BeanBoozled, a game in which participants eat jelly beans with odd flavours such as rotten egg.

SHAN AND SHAISTA SHOW

bit.ly/2tyA9nZ

Started: October last year
Subscribers: 780
Total views: 13,700

This YouTube channel featuring Shan Ehan, eight, and his sister Shaista Eman, six, has only three videos so far, but the pair have made quite a name for themselves on social media.

That is because their mother is television host and actress Nurul Aini, 36, and both children regularly feature in her popular Instagram posts.

The most popular among their three YouTube videos, with more

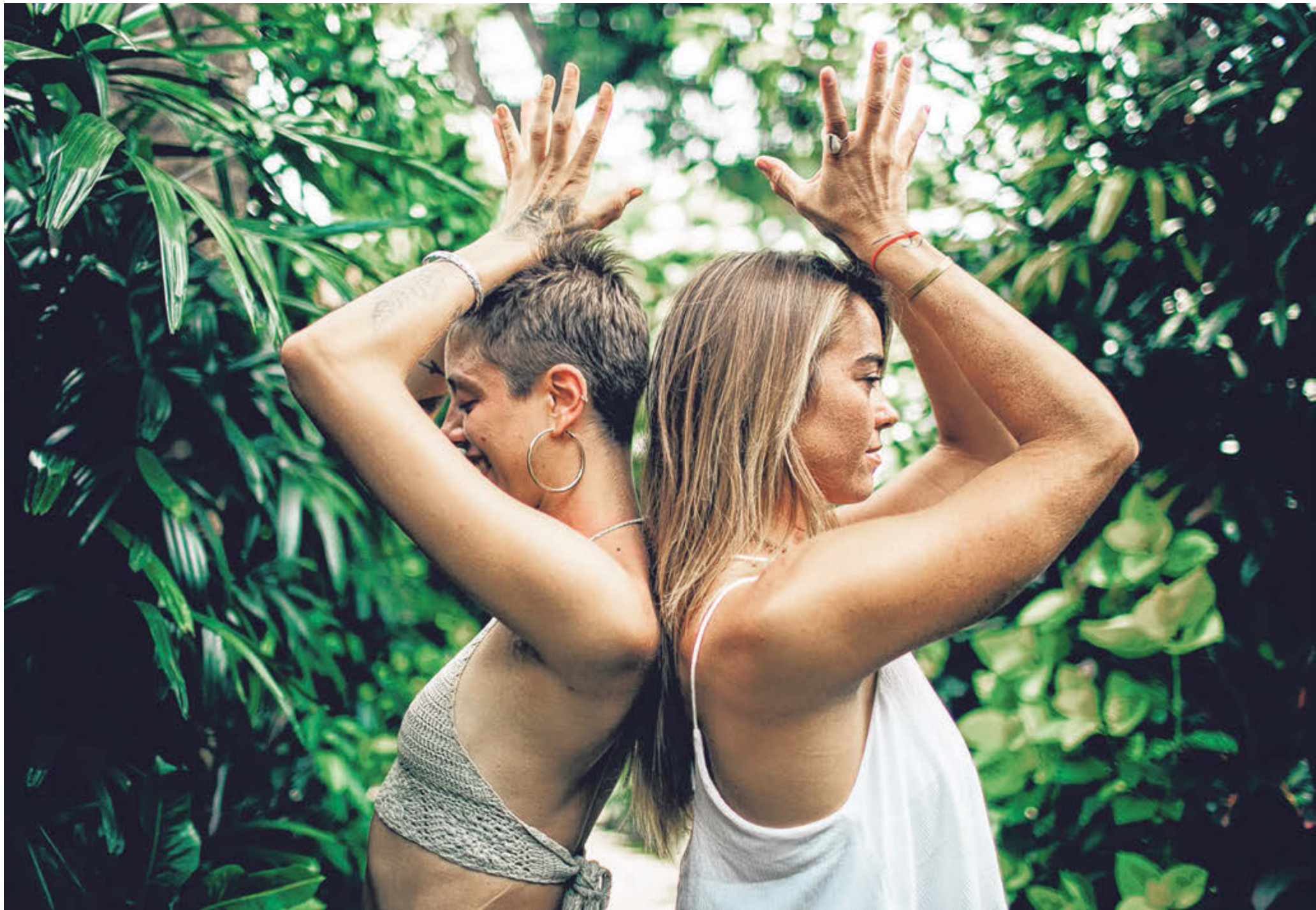
than 8,000 views, shows Shaista doing a playful, tongue-in-cheek make-up tutorial.

In another video, she takes on a "spicy noodle challenge", which she says is not spicy at all.

The third video shows her and Shan playing BeanBoozled, a game in which participants eat jelly beans with odd flavours such as rotten egg and lawn clippings.

Shaista, who has her mother's charm and seems completely at ease in front of the camera, has also done acting and hosting, appearing in major events such as the 2017 National Day Parade.

DIGITAL DETOX



Learn surfing and yoga and attend a self-love workshop at Be Kind Retreats in Bali. PHOTO: BE KIND RETREATS BALI

Feeling overwhelmed? Join a retreat to unplug, meditate, surf (waves, not the Web), learn positive habits and reconnect with your spiritual side



Clara Lock

When Mr Roy Tay goes on holiday, he usually visits beach resorts in Thailand or Bali, or cities such as Bangkok. But last November, he took a vacation of a different kind, spending a week at a monastery in central Thailand's Sing Buri province, where he slept on a straw mattress on the floor and woke up at 4am for prayers.

Instead of checking his phone every 10 minutes for texts and e-mail, the entrepreneur and self-confessed workaholic limited his screen time to two 15-minute sessions a day to answer urgent e-mail and check in with his wife. As a civilian staying at the monastery, he was allowed to use his phone, but chose to mirror the lifestyle of the monks there.

It was a refreshing change from the approximately 7½ hours he spends on his phone every day.

The 36-year-old Buddhist said of his first such retreat: "It was interesting to realise how much I was using my phone. Being away from devices gave me time to reflect on things like work and family, as well as take stock of the year."

While Wi-Fi on vacation has become a necessity for many travellers, some are choosing to unplug. In a 2016 report on tourism trends, the European Travel Commission said that people have become more conscious about their constant use of technology, driving demand for holidays where they can relax,

detox and slow down.

One such holiday is a mindful, women-only surf camp in Bali held by Be Kind Retreats. During a six-day programme, participants take part in surfing and yoga lessons as well as a "self-love" workshop that helps them foster positive habits and routines. The company, which was founded at the start of last year, has received about 100 guests since it opened.

Using digital devices in front of other guests is not allowed.

The retreat's website states: "Social media feeds perfectionism. Distancing yourself from social media gives you the opportunity to connect with yourself and find out who you are, what your purpose is and what you really want in life."

TIME FOR REFLECTION

Mr Jarrod Lee, 37, experienced this first-hand while staying at a Catholic monastery in Perth in 2011. He had been contemplating a career switch from teaching to musical theatre to fulfil a childhood dream, but decided to maintain theatre as a hobby in the end.

Mr Lee says the lack of distraction at the monastery helped him come to a decision. "In Singapore, I am switched on 24/7 and there is often no time to think. At the

monastery, the silence is very helpful. There is nothing clamouring for my attention," adds the bachelor, who is Catholic.

He goes for retreats at least once a year at Catholic monasteries or retreat centres in Melbourne, Chiang Mai and Yorkshire, England, where phones are discouraged, although this is not enforced. His first retreat was in 2004 and he started going more frequently a few years after.

Other places are stricter. Last year, business analyst Sheana Ng spent 10 days on a vipassana meditation retreat in Kulim, a town near Penang.

Vipassana, in the ancient language of Pali, means "to see the true nature of reality". To do that, Ms Ng had to turn in all electronic devices, books and writing material at the start of the retreat. Speaking and even eye contact with the other 20 or so participants were not allowed.

The 29-year-old, who is single, says she was initially anxious about being away from her phone for so long. She spends about eight hours on it every day checking work e-mail and social media and staying in touch with her parents, who live in China.

She also struggled to meditate

amid physical discomfort.

"When you have to sit still for an hour, you start fidgeting and feeling itchy and your legs will get numb. Vipassana teaches you that whatever you are feeling or experiencing will pass," she says.

While these teachings originated in Buddhism, the course is non-religious and open to all.

KEEPING BUSY

Without the distraction of devices, retreat guests take part in meaningful work instead.

During Mr Tay's retreat at Wat Thep Mongkol, which he attended with about 15 secondary school friends, he accompanied the monks on their daily route seeking alms in a nearby village and was moved by the generosity of the locals.

"Some of them were really poor, wearing torn and tattered clothing, but every morning they gave what they could afford," he says. The food – a mix of Thai curries and stir-fried vegetables – was always freshly cooked, plentiful and delicious, he adds.

Besides meditation and prayer sessions, Mr Tay and his friends spent their afternoons cleaning and repairing parts of the monastery as well as talking to the resident monks.

"It was not a very traditional monastery where the monks are put on a pedestal. Instead, we could chat like friends and were encouraged to ask questions about Buddhism and meditation," he says.

BACK TO REALITY

A digital detox may be possible on vacation, but back in daily life, sustaining it is a work in progress.

For Mr Tay, the retreat has made him more mindful of how he uses his phone. While he has not cut down on screen time, he now focuses on one task at a time, such as finishing composing an e-mail or text message before checking incoming notifications.

As for Ms Ng, the vipassana retreat has given her better control of her emotions and made her less quick to react to negative things.

But when it comes to using her phone less, old habits die hard.

She says: "After the course, I slowly went back to my habit of checking my phone every few minutes. I want to give myself more phone-free time, but sometimes I forget to do so."



Mr Roy Tay (left) spent a week at monastery Wat Thep Mongkol in central Thailand, where he slept on a straw mattress, joined the monks in seeking alms and awoke at 4am for prayers.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ROY TAY

Go off the grid

Surf and self-love in Bali

Take surfing and yoga classes at a Be Kind retreat in Bali, which also features a self-love workshop that helps participants foster positive habits and routines. A six-day retreat costs €795 (S\$1,220) for a shared room. For more information, go to www.bekindretreatsbali.com

Digital detox in Khao Yai

Unplug at a Digital Detox Asia retreat in lush Khao Yai, Thailand, which is held at Parco by Bonanza. A 48-hour retreat costs 7,499 baht (S\$325). For more information, go to www.digitaldetoxasia.com

Meditate in Malaysia

There are about 150 vipassana meditation centres around the world, with three in Malaysia – in Kulim, near Penang, Saleng in Johor, and Kuantan. Students are expected to stay for 10 days and abide by a set of rules, such as abstaining from alcohol and sexual activity. Course fees are on a donation basis and students are allowed to donate after they have completed a course. For more information, go to www.malaya.dhamma.org

Spiritual retreat in Yorkshire

Spend a few days at Ampleforth Abbey in Yorkshire, England, on a spiritual retreat. Accommodation starts at £36 (S\$63.50) a person a night. For more information, go to www.ampleforth.org.uk/visitors or e-mail pastoral@ampleforth.org.uk

Spiritual retreat in Chiang Mai

Seek peace and quiet at the Seven Fountains Jesuit Retreat Centre in Chiang Mai, Thailand, which offers individual and group retreats. A suggested donation of 850 baht (S\$36.90) a night covers room and board. For more information, go to www.thesevenfountains.org

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When nature nurtures

Forest bathing in Japan's Ashizu Valley Trail Therapy Road and soaking in a hot spring in Tamatsukuri Onsen are therapy for the body and soul

Sharon Sim

My field of vision was a narrow strip of the tree canopy, a lacework of leaves and branches against the waning blue of the sky.

Lying cocooned in a cloth hammock with a slender opening between the cloth lips to gaze out of, my view sways gently and I expect to feel impatient, or at least motion-sickness.

But instead, like a baby in a sarong cradle – I'm lulled into a state of calm and with it, heightened awareness.

Of the sturdy pine trunks to which my hammock is anchored. Of the breeze which moves my hammock slightly and rustles the leaves overhead.

Barely two hours before, it was with a healthy dose of scepticism and a harried mind that I stepped into the forest to begin my first experience with forest bathing in the Ashizu Valley Trail Therapy Road in Chizu Town, Tottori Prefecture, in West Japan's San'in region.

It is about a three-hour drive from Hiroshima and 2½ hours from Osaka.

HEALING POWERS OF NATURE

I first read about forest therapy in articles popping up increasingly in the last few years on mainstream publications and websites, with many listing it as the latest must-do wellness trend.

Resort spas in Britain, the United States, Cambodia and Malaysia offer the activity, and in Singapore, local guides who are certified lead the wellness therapy here.

Forest bathing focuses on attuning all your senses to take in or "bathe" in the forest's atmosphere.

It derives from the phrase shinrin-yoku (shinrin is "forest" in Japanese and yoku is "bath") coined by the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries but has ancient roots in Shinto and Buddhist teachings on the balance of man with nature.

Certified guides lead participants through a series of stations with guided activities like deep breathing exercises or even group sharing.

I was keen to try it out in Japan with its 48 designated forest therapy bases and roads, especially after I learnt about the numerous studies backing its benefits. Researchers list lowered blood pressure and anxiety, pain alleviation, and a strengthened immune function among many other health gains.

It is spring and a late afternoon in Ashizu Valley when I meet my guide, Ms Yuko Okagashi, to start our two-hour session, shortened from the regular four hours or more, to accommodate my packed schedule.

After a short health questionnaire done on a tablet, my results on

the health assessment software show my imbalances, such as having a low threshold for forbearance and focus.

With time and my shortcomings bearing down, I head into the forest, sure that the experience would leave no more of an impression than a walk in the park.

Ms Yuko, an apple-cheeked 59-year-old, leads me down leaf-strewn trails into a world of moss-covered rocks and willowy trees slanting out of the mountainside.

Across a ravine, the slope is a sea of golden foliage and we pause to marvel at a waterfall gushing stark white down it.

I am encouraged to take notice of the forest's features from many different angles like peering at a mossy tiny tendrils and running my fingers over its velvety surface.

There are towering old cedars that dwarf me and Yuko points out a 300-year-old cypress whose roots have wrapped entirely around a boulder over time.

A key to the gains that spending time in the forest holds is found in the air.

Researchers in a 2009 study by Tokyo's Nippon Medical School found that exposure to phytoncides (volatile compounds which plants emit) led to a decrease in stress hormones in test subjects, as well as significantly higher activity and numbers of natural killer cells – white blood cells which target viruses and cancerous tumours.

The forest in Ashizu Valley, says Ms Yuko, has one of the highest concentrations of alpha-pinene and limonene – the two phytoncides which imbue the most health-giving benefits – among Japan's forest therapy trails and I consciously try to inhale deeply as we walk.

While going through each station: from deep breathing in a cliff-side clearing; to listening through a bamboo pole to the drip-drip of water in an echo-y underground chamber and getting goosebumps, I found the tension ebbing from my shoulders.

Not all were memorable, but I enjoyed the magical moment wrapped in the hammock when my overactive mind with its constant stream of thoughts was given a rest.

I learnt to focus on the slit of green trees in my view, to listen to the leaves rustling and just be.

Besides a rekindled sense of wonder, the entire experience left a lingering sense of tranquillity for days after and now, whenever my disquiet mind needs some silence, I transport myself to that moment in the hammock to centre my mind.

ONSEN THERAPY

For another therapy that involves baths, but requires me to actually dip in water this time, I travel to Tamatsukuri Onsen, a hot spring town renowned for its water's beautifying properties.

Here, the Toji culture of bathing in mineral-rich hot spring water for curative purposes.

This age-old custom, known in other parts of the world as balneotherapy, was traditionally a medical treatment where the sick would stay at hot spring inns for a few days to a week and follow a prescribed sequence of baths and bathing therapies to



treat or prevent an illness.

There are a range of hot spring inns or ryokans to suit different budgets. My stay at Hoshino Resorts Kai Izumo, a boutique hot spring ryokan, is a sumptuous cap to this wellness trip.

All the spacious rooms have their own private outdoor baths and there is a picturesque rotenburo (open-air bath) for all guests to use, but it is to the wood-scented communal indoor bath with its mirrored surface that is the very picture of tranquillity to which I am drawn.

Guests are provided with a Toji culture handbook suggesting the sequence of bath rituals, how to stretch and how best to enjoy an onsen bath.

The resort even has a signature massage technique in its Sleep Massage (for relaxation and deeper sleep) and Muscle Massage (for releasing aching knots) that guests could book to enhance their hot spring therapy experience.

As I walk, bath-warmed, along the dimmed hallways to the dining hall for my kaiseki dinner, I think about what the two wellness therapies have in common: Both allowed me to break away from the built-up pressures of urban structure and recalibrate in restorative nature.

That night, while gasping in delight over course after visually-stimulating course of dinner, I remember that my forest bathing guide, Ms Yuko, told me that on certain

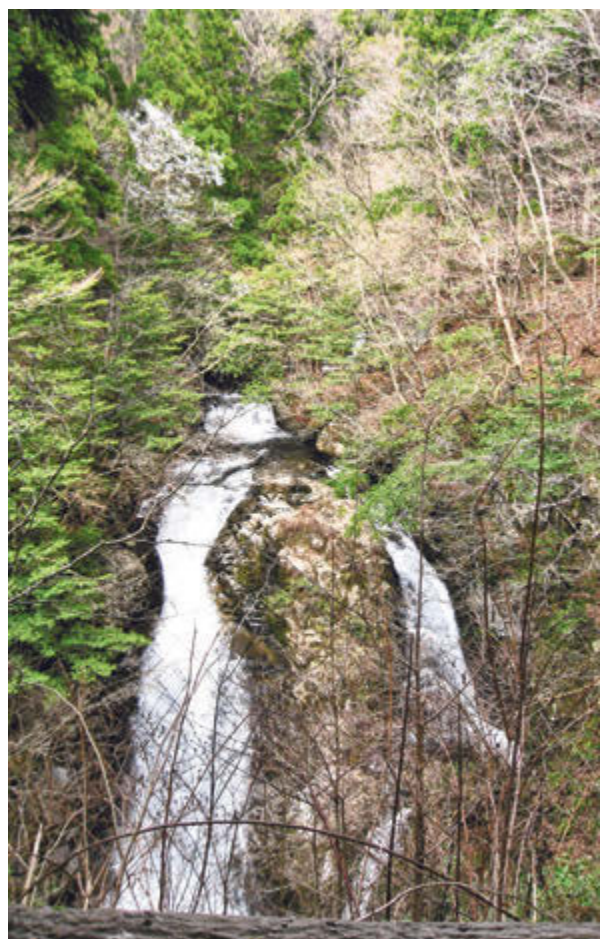
early mornings, visitors to the Ashizu Valley Trail forest could actually see the phytoncide – which is most concentrated in the wee hours – as a purple mist hanging low on the ground.

That is enough reason for a return trip, to marvel at the phenomenon and soak in both the health-giving goodness of the forest as well as hot spring therapy.

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• The writer's trip was hosted by the San'in Tourism Organisation and Hoshino Resorts

The rotenburo onsen, or open air bath (above), at boutique hot spring ryokan Hoshino Resorts Kai Izumo warms you to the bones, despite the chilly weather. PHOTO: HOSHINO RESORTS



A waterfall in Ashizu Valley Trail Therapy Road in Chizu Town, where visitors can go forest bathing. PHOTO: SHARON SIM



A stay in Hoshino Resorts Kai Izumo includes an exquisite kaiseki dinner and breakfast. PHOTO: HOSHINO RESORTS

GETTING THERE

I flew to Osaka, then took the JR Kansai-koku line to Osaka Station where I changed to the JR Super Hakuto line to Chizu Station, to get to Chizu Town. Tamatsukuri Onsen is about a 2½-hour drive from Chizu Town.

Take a bus from Kawaramachi bus stop in Chizu Town to Tottori Station bus stop, then the JR San'in Line to Matsue Station. Next, take the bus at Shoko Station bus stop to Tamatsukuri Onsen bus stop.

WHERE TO STAY

- In Chizu Town, I stayed at a homestay or minpaku (7,500 yen, or \$592, a night), where I was hosted by a warm elderly couple in a three-generation household.
- Homestays usually provide dinner and breakfast, and my hosts went out of their way to prepare beautifully-presented meals.
- Some homestay hosts can arrange for their guests to go foraging in the forests for wild plants and fungi, but as it was not the season for it, my female host suggested a walk instead. She showed me her vegetable plot nearby and picked, from the path-side outside her home, the same fern fronds which she had cooked as a side dish for dinner the night before.
- In Tamatsukuri Onsen, my stay in Hoshino Resorts Kai Izumo included an exquisite kaiseki dinner and breakfast. (Doubles from 58,000 yen a night; 1237 Tamatsukuri, Tamayu-cho, Matsue-shi, Shimane 699-0200; bit.ly/2tw2MSz)
- For more information on forest bathing in Japan, go to infom.org/forestmedicine base/japan
- For enquiries on, or reservations for forest bathing and homestays in Chizu Town, Japan, e-mail: therapy@town.chizu.tottori.jp and minpaku@town.chizu.tottori.jp respectively

Research shows that exposure to volatile compounds given off by plants lead to a decrease in stress hormones, so a walk in the forest is never a bad idea. PHOTO: ISTOCK.COM



Mr Richard Tong, with his wife Rita, won a glamping trip for two to Shangri-La, Yunnan, worth \$10,000, which is part of the ST+ news with benefits programme. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

ST+
news with benefits

ST subscriber wins glamping trip for his 75th birthday

Desiree Loh

For retiree Richard Tong, winning a six-day glamping getaway in a contest for subscribers of The Straits Times is nothing short of serendipitous.

The day he chanced upon the giveaway – Feb 8 – was his 75th birthday and also the deadline of the contest, which he read about in the newspaper.

"It was a totally impromptu decision to join. Since it was my birthday, I thought 'Why not?'" said Mr Tong, who used to work in the banking industry.

On Wednesday, he received news of his win – a \$10,000 glamping trip for two to Shangri-La, Yunnan – which he described as a "belated birthday present". He will be going with his wife Rita, 73.

The couple will savour their first glamping experience at The Hidden Valley Resort, where they will get to sleep in a tented villa furnished with Wi-Fi, a king-sized bed, wood-burning stoves and personal shower facilities. They will also enjoy round-trip airfare, guided activities and meals prepared by the resort's resident chef.

The contest is part of the ST+ news with benefits programme to reward loyal subscribers. The glamping trip is sponsored by The Hidden Valley Resort.

Ms Cynara Tan, the resort's managing director, said: "They can look forward to an authentic travel experience, immersing themselves in Tibetan culture and farm-to-table dining. I hope they can soak up the ambience of the resort because it's a destination in itself."

The couple, who celebrated their golden anniversary last year and have three children, are avid travellers who have been to countries including Croatia, Egypt and Switzerland.

Said Mrs Tong, who is also retired: "We love travelling and I love mountains and flowers, so I'm really looking forward to this trip."

Her husband, who is an adventurous eater, is excited about digging into the exotic dishes of Shangri-La.

"I love to eat and I eat everything. I want to try yak meat, yak pizza, and yak butter and cheese," he said. The couple have been ST subscribers for more than 50 years and read the newspaper daily at breakfast.

But this is the first time they have participated in an ST contest.

"I've never taken the time to join before, so winning this trip on my first try is a nice surprise."

chewonitcomics.blogspot.com

chew on
A DATING APP

Over six million Coffee Meets Bagel accounts have been compromised.

I am a user of that dating app. So what if my name and e-mail are stolen? What can the hackers do with the info?

Send us \$\$\$... or we'll tell your wife the app from which we got your info.

LATER...

chewonitcomics.blogspot.com

BABY BLUES™

BY RICK KIRKMAN & JERRY SCOTT

Hammie, if you're going outside, be sure to bundle up!

AWWW, MOM!

DO I HAVE TO?

JUST WEAR A SCARF.

REALLY?

IT WOULD MAKE YOUR MOTHER VERY HAPPY.

OKAY.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING??

MAKING MOM HAPPY.

PEANUTS

featuring "Good ol' Charlie Brown"

by SCHULZ

OH, COME ON NOW... BE REASONABLE!

I TRY TO DO MY BEST! I ALWAYS HAVE YOUR SUPPER READY ON TIME, AND I ALWAYS TRY TO FIX IT JUST THE WAY YOU WANT IT...

BUT NOW YOU'RE GOING TOO FAR!

OH, ALL RIGHT... I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO... I MUST BE OUT OF MY MIND...

SOMETIMES EVEN I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW WISHY-WASHY I AM...

YOU WILL? GOOD... I REALLY APPRECIATE IT...

SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH WANTING TO BE SERVED BY A BEAUTIFUL WAITRESS?

SHERMAN'S LAGOON

BY JIM TOOMEY

SHERM, I'M DOING A SCHOOL PROJECT AND I NEED YOUR HELP.

OKAY.

IT'S AN INTELLIGENCE TEST.

IF YOU PUSH THE RIGHT COMBINATION OF BUTTONS, CHOCOLATE POPS OUT.

PUSH THE WRONG BUTTONS, AND YOU GET SHOCKED BY 20,000 VOLTS OF ELECTRICITY.

I'LL GIVE IT A WHIRL.

REALLY?

YOU MIGHT EXPLODE INTO A MILLION SMOLDERING BITS.

BRING IT ON.

YOU'RE THE FIRST ONE TO ACTUALLY TRY THIS.

FOR CHOCOLATE, WHY NOT?

WHY DON'T I JUST WRITE YOU DOWN AS "FLUNKED"?

BETTER STAND BACK.

garfield.com

GARFIELD

Play

CLICK

HELLO WHISKERS, AND WELCOME TO "PROPER TECHNIQUES FOR SHREPPING SOFA ARMS"

IN THIS WEB TUTORIAL, I'LL BE INSTRUCTING YOU CATS OUT THERE ON THE FINEST POINTS OF THIS FUN AND CREATIVE PASTIME

LET'S WARM UP NOW WITH SOME BASIC VERTICAL SLASHES. WATCH CAREFULLY AS I-

CLICK

THE RED JACK GOES ON THE BLACK QUEEN

THANKS

BREWSTER ROCKIT: SPACE GUY!

BY TIM RICKARD

I'M GETTING A MESSAGE FROM MARS ... THEY CLAIM THEY'RE BEING INVADED!

WELL, OVER THE YEARS, EARTH HAS SENT **DOZENS** OF SPACECRAFT TO MARS!

"WE HAVE SENT ORBITERS, FLYBYS ..."

"LANDERS ..."

"ROVERS AND PROBES!"

STUPID MARTIANS! IF THEY WERE BEING INVADED, **WE'D** KNOW IT!

CRAZY CONSPIRACY THEORISTS!

Sudoku Pacific

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

8		6		3		7		
	5		2	7				
	1			6			9	
1			7			4		
				4				
	2				6			5
	6			8			7	
				5	9		1	
		4		1		3		2

2/24

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

6	1	7	2	9	3	8	5	4
8	9	2	5	7	4	6	3	1
4	5	3	1	6	8	2	9	7
2	3	8	9	4	5	7	1	6
9	4	1	7	8	6	3	2	5
7	6	5	3	2	1	9	4	8
3	7	6	4	5	9	1	8	2
5	2	9	8	1	7	4	6	3
1	8	4	6	3	2	5	7	9

sphrewards

The SPH Rewards Loyalty Programme Allows SPH Direct Subscribers To Access A Range Of Special Deals And Lucky Draw Privileges.

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- Download the SPH Rewards app from the Apple App Store or Google Play.
- Users with existing digital accounts can use the same userID and password to log into the app. Those who have yet to create a mysph account can register on the app.

Interested merchants may email rewards@sph.com.sg for more information.



Photo: Speech Academy

Speak with confidence at Speech Academy

Public speaking is a really important skill that children should be encouraged to nurture from young. It is not just about fulfilling the requisites of the show-and-tell assessment in school, but also gives them crucial life skills and attributes such as confidence and self-belief.

Speech Academy Asia advocates using public speaking for children to create happier and more meaningful relationships while helping them to excel in school and become effective leaders. Help your children become a Speech Champion by enrolling them in Singapore's first Public Speaking holiday camp for children that is focused on developing them into a confident orator.

Throughout this camp, your children will be taught the Speech Linguistic Patterns and Neuro Somatics techniques, which contain more than thousands of methods for improving body language, voice, emotions, and speech crafting.



The holiday camps are great for your children to take part in both indoor and outdoor lessons, which provides them with intensive, hands-on learning. Public speaking techniques will be imparted in a fun way such that our students can continuously practise being great speakers. Your children will get a much-needed confidence boost for speaking in public, as well as leadership skills.

The two-day camp will be held from 9 am to 4 pm on 19 and 20 March 2019 at Speech Academy Asia's Headquarters, located at Yo:Ha @ Jurong.

SPH Rewards subscribers, can enjoy a special price of \$280 for the camp! Simply head to <https://www.gevme.com/speechacademy> from now to 10 March 2019 to register.

Cloudy Bay Presents The Exquisite Treasures Of Wan Hao Chinese Restaurant

Singapore Marriott Tang Plaza Hotel's award-winning Wan Hao Chinese Restaurant is now newly re-opened after a phase of major refurbishments.

To celebrate its re-opening, Cloudy Bay Winery and Wan Hao Chinese Restaurant are bringing to you a specially designed dinner event, complete with exquisite food and wine pairing.

Diners can expect signature favourites like their Double-Boiled Superior Soup and Tea Smoked Wagyu Beef with King Mushroom, to be accompanied by the sophistication of Cloudy Bay Wines; Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc, Cloudy Bay Chardonnay, Cloudy Bay Tekoko and Cloudy Bay Pinot Noir.

Helming Wan Hao Chinese Restaurant's kitchen is Executive Chef Brian Wong. With more than 15 years of culinary expertise from his stint at notable restaurants that spans across Europe to Asia, this award-winning chef's skills are unquestionable.

Thus, clear your calendar for 28 February 2019. Chef's selection of Canapés paired with Sauvignon Blanc will be served at the reception at 7pm.



Photo: Wan Hao Chinese Restaurant, All pictures shown are for illustration purpose only

Dinner will start formally at 7.30pm with a short speech by the Chef and winery representative. This exclusive one-night dinner event is a gastronomic experience not to be missed.

SPH subscribers get to enjoy a special rate of \$174.20 nett (Usual Price: \$233.05). To purchase your tickets, simply visit <https://www.gevme.com/wanhao>.

Tickets will be on sale from now to 26 February 2019. Menu and pairing details are accurate as of 31 January 2019.



MARVEL STUDIOS' CAPTAIN MARVEL

Set in the 1990s, Marvel Studios' "Captain Marvel" is an all-new adventure from a previously unseen period in the history of the Marvel Cinematic Universe that follows the journey of Carol Danvers as she becomes one of the universe's most powerful heroes.

While a galactic war between two alien races reaches Earth, Danvers finds herself and a small cadre of allies at the center of the maelstrom.

120 Lucky Direct Subscribers Stand To Win A Pair Of Movie Invites Held On Thu 7th March At 6.40pm Suntec GV.

To Take Part:
1)Download the SPH Rewards
2)Look for this giveaway in the Rewards section and click on the "join" button to answer the question.



Photo: Ariston's constant temperature instant water heater

Save more with Ariston's Constant Temperature (CT) instant water heaters

Ariston Thermo's AURES Instant Water Heater equipped with Constant Temperature (CT) technology is the first and only water heater in Singapore to be officially certified by PSB Singapore to be energy saving, with a utility savings of at least 16.4%.Ariston was the first in the World to launch its series of instant water heaters with CT technology.

These models are equipped with flow sensor (or flow switch), a series of Negative Temperature Coefficient (NTC) sensors and TRIAC. These sensors allow the heater to measure the temperature and flow of the water entering the water heater, and with TRIAC, the heater is able to adjust the power of the heating.

Ariston believes in offering high quality, energy efficient products that have limited impact on the environment, giving its users only the best in comfort. Its instant water heaters are not only water and energy saving, but also provide greater shower comfort through touch interface, digital temperature display, user profile memory and more. On top of that, these water heaters are beautifully designed in Italy to fit any bathroom decorations. An anti-scalding feature is also present making the water heater safe for child use.

Many people do not realise that water heaters are one of the major consumers of utilities at home. For homes that are using older water heaters especially, they may also find it more cost effective in the long run to go for energy-saving water heaters.

As an exclusive treat for SPH subscribers, five lucky winners stand to win an Ariston RT33 CT instant water heater, worth \$359. To win, take part in the contest in the Rewards section of the SPH Rewards App. To encourage more homeowners to upgrade their instant water heaters, a free travel pillow will be given complimentary with any purchase of Ariston's CT instant water heaters. These are redeemable at Audio House from now to 10 March 2019, Sunday, located at 72 Bendemeer Road #01-20/21/22 Singapore 339941.

For more information of the product, please visit www.ariston.com. Alternatively, you can also call 6841 2122 or visit Audio House website at www.audiohouse.com.sg for more information.

Free to air

CHANNEL 5
AM
6.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (Variety)
7.00 The Dr Oz Show 8 (HD) (Info-Ed)
8.00 Talking Point 2018 (Current Affairs)
8.30 Wheel Of Fortune 35 (HD) (Variety)
9.30 Discovering Korean Food With Gizzi Erskine (Info-Ed)
10.00 Hollywood In Vienna – A Tribute To James Horner (Culture)
PM
12.00 Meat And Greed 2 (HD) (Variety)
12.30 Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course (HD) (Info-Ed)
1.00 America's Got Talent 12 (HD) (PG) (Variety)
2.00 Radio 1's Big Weekend 2016 (Variety)
3.15 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (Variety)
3.30 Stars In Style 4 (Variety)
4.00 Buzzing Hawks (Variety)
5.00 The \$100,000 Pyramid (HD) (PG) (Variety)
5.30 Films & Stars (PG) (Variety)
6.00 Tricked (Canada) (PG) (Variety)
6.30 Just For Laughs Gags 18 (Variety)
6.45 Blockbuster Sunday: Ghostbusters (PG) (Movie)
9.00 News 5 (HD)
9.30 Wild City (CC) (Info-Ed)
10.30 Lip Sync Battle 4 (PG13) (CC) (Variety)
11.00 Fear Factor MTV USA (PG) (Variety)
AM
12.00 Survivor 38 (Variety)
1.00 Hollywood In Vienna – A Tribute To James Horner (Culture)
2.45 Radio 1's Big Weekend 2016 (Variety)
3.50 Lip Sync Battle 4 (CC) (Variety)
4.20 Wheel Of Fortune 35 (HD) (Variety)
5.10 The Dr Oz Show 8 (HD) (Info-Ed)
CHANNEL 8
AM
6.00 Food Source 4 (HD) (Variety)
7.00 Portrait Of Home 2 (Drama)
9.00 Beijing Opera Cats 2 (Schoolkids)
9.30 New Doraemon (Schoolkids)
10.00 Little Incredible Explorer (Schoolkids)
10.30 Mark Your Calendar (Schoolkids)

11.00 Tuesday Report – #myconnections2 (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.30 One Hundred Tastes Of Taiwan 2 (HD) (Info-Ed)
PM
12.00 Justice In The City (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.00 City Foragers (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.30 Say It! (Variety)
3.30 Home Dining (CC) (Variety)
4.30 Beyond Words (PG) (CC) (Drama)
6.30 Singapore Today (HD) (News)
7.00 Spring Flower (PG) (CC) (Drama)
8.00 Chingay 2019 (Variety)
10.00 News Tonight (HD) (News)
10.30 Budget Forum 2019 (Current Affairs)
11.30 The Best Of Food Source 3 (Variety)
AM
12.00 The Legend Of S (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.00 Unriddle 2 (PG) (Drama)
4.00 The Legendary Vagabond (PG) (Drama)

CHANNEL U
AM
8.00 Home Shopping (Infomercial)
10.00 Perfect Match 3 (Variety)
PM
12.00 Rites Of Motherhood (CC) (Info-Ed)
12.30 Food Secrets (CC) (Info-Ed)
1.30 Come Dance With Me (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.00 Schools Unlimited (CC) (Info-Ed)
3.00 Golden Rainbow (PG) (CC) (Drama)
5.00 Mrs Cop (PG) (CC) (Drama)
7.00 Sound Of My Dream 2 (Variety)
9.00 The Entertainer (PG) (CC) (Drama)
11.00 News Tonight (News)
11.30 Sound Of My Dream 2 (Variety)
AM
1.30 Lord Of Shanghai (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.30 Close

CHANNEL NEWSASIA
AM
6.00 Singapore Tonight
6.30 Correspondents' Diary
7.00 News Now
7.30 Asia Business First Weekend
8.00 News Now
8.30 Once A Refugee
9.00 News Now
9.30 This Weekend
10.02 Conversation With
10.30 Super Octogenarians
11.00 News Now
11.30 Correspondents' Diary
PM
12.00 News Now

12.30 Asia Business First Weekend
1.02 Japan Hour (English Subtitles)
2.00 News Now
2.30 The Budget And You
3.00 News Now
3.30 Once A Refugee
4.02 Conversation With
4.30 Super Octogenarians
5.00 News Now
5.30 Asia Business First Weekend
6.00 News Now
6.30 Correspondents' Diary
7.02 Once A Refugee (CC)
7.30 This Weekend (CC)
8.00 Primetime Asia
8.30 Asia Business First Weekend
9.02 Land Unlimited
10.00 Singapore Tonight
10.30 On The Red Dot – Risky Business (CC)

11.02 Distracted While Driving
AM
12.00 News Now
12.30 This Weekend
1.02 Asia Business First Weekend
1.30 On The Red Dot – Risky Business (CC)
2.00 News Now
2.30 The Budget And You
3.02 Conversation With
3.30 Super Octogenarians
4.00 News Now
4.30 Once A Refugee
5.02 Land Unlimited

Programmes may be pre-empted by breaking news

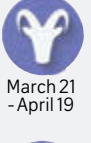
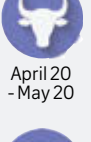
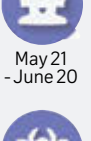
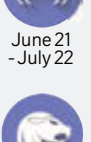
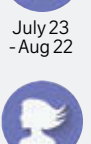
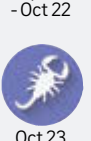
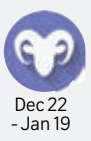
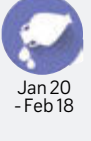
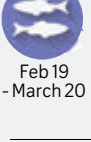
VASANTHAM
PM
1.00 Masterpiece (PG) (Movie)
4.00 Makkal En Pakkam (PG) (Movie)
7.00 OK Kanmani (Schoolkids)
7.30 Ha Ha Ha Sirippu 2017 (Variety)
8.00 Vera Level (CC) (Info-Ed)
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 Budget & You (Current Affairs)
AM
12.00 Tamil Seithi (R) (News)
12.30 Close

OKTO
AM
7.00 Floogals (Preschool)
8.00 Sesame Street (HD) (Preschool)
9.00 OddBods (Schoolkids)
9.30 Tobot (HD) (Schoolkids)
10.00 Future Card Buddyfight Ace (Schoolkids)
10.30 CardFight! Vanguard (HD) (Schoolkids)
11.00 Lego Ninjago 9 – Hunted (HD) (Schoolkids)
11.30 Xtreme Football (HD) (Schoolkids)
PM
12.00 Basic Mini-tary Training (Schoolkids)
12.30 Museum Mysteries (Schoolkids)

1.00 Loud House (Schoolkids)
1.30 Jane And The Dragon (Schoolkids)
2.00 Inazuma Eleven (Schoolkids)
2.30 The Deep (HD) (Schoolkids)
3.00 Future Card Buddyfight (CC) (Schoolkids)
3.30 CardFight! Vanguard G: Next (HD) (Schoolkids)
4.00 Bear Grylls Survival School (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
4.30 Loud House (Schoolkids)
5.00 Jane And The Dragon (Schoolkids)
5.30 Inazuma Eleven (Schoolkids)
6.00 Before I Was Awesome (HD) (Schoolkids)
6.30 Exlosers 2 (Drama)
7.00 The Deep (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
7.30 Future Card Buddyfight (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
8.00 CardFight! Vanguard G: Next (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
8.30 Bear Grylls Survival School (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
9.00 Ninja Warrior (PG) (CC) (Variety)
9.30 Perfection (CC) (Sports)
10.00 Laureus World Sports Awards Monaco 2019 (HD) (Sports)
AM
12.00 Close

SURIA
AM
10.00 Atuk PhD (Drama)
11.00 Solo (CC) (Info-Ed)
PM
12.00 Rempuh (Drama)
12.30 Suami Tanpa Cinta (HD) (Drama)
1.30 Demi Cinta (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.00 Isteri Tuan Ihsan (Drama)
3.00 Ye Ke?! (CC) (Variety)
4.00 Meh Sandar Pada Aku (HD) (PG) (Drama)
5.00 Rahsia Hati Perempuan (PG) (CC) (Drama)
6.00 Skuad Cilik (CC) (S)
6.30 Alah Abang, Amboi Kakak (PG) (CC) (Info-Ed)
7.00 The Project (CC) (Info-Ed)
7.30 Jalan-Jalan Makan Angin (CC) (Info-Ed)
8.00 Berita (HD) (News)
8.30 Wahhhnita (Info-Ed)
9.30 Rahsia Hati Perempuan (PG) (CC) (Drama)
10.30 The Streets 2 (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.00 Juang Seorang Usahawan (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.30 Berita (HD) (R) (News)
AM
12.00 Close

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singtelv.com.sg

Horoscopes	 March 21 - April 19	Your aggressive tendencies are out in the open and you need to do something about that. Make sure you do not unleash your fury on someone undeserving.
	 April 20 - May 20	You do not own your spouse or your kids, but on a day like today, you wish you did. It is one of those times when you just cannot get enough of your people and that can lead to strange tensions.
	 May 21 - June 20	You need to kick back a little and see what is going on. Your observational prowess is making life much simpler, so do not worry too much about whether things are going your way yet.
	 June 21 - July 22	Try not to get yourself too wrapped up in your emotions – you need to make the most of what you have. It is a good time for big changes because you are grounded enough to handle almost anything.
	 July 23 - Aug 22	It is a great day to go shopping, especially at second-hand stores or online – your eye for good bargains is impeccable. See if you can get your people to deal with things your way.
	 Aug 23 - Sept 22	There is much more going on than anyone can see, so make sure you are looking, thinking and looking some more. You should pick up on hidden signals.
	 Sept 23 - Oct 22	Your selfish side is out in force and you might find that your energy is best expended on intensely personal projects. There is no shame in it, so make sure you are taking care of business.
	 Oct 23 - Nov 21	You are more respected than ever, so make the most of it. Someone close needs you to show him you have been paying attention. Things will get better soon.
	 Nov 22 - Dec 21	You need some downtime and might want to be alone. It is a good day for you to check in with your people to make sure they do not need you, then you can vanish for as long as you wish.
	 Dec 22 - Jan 19	Try to get your friends to dig in and help you out – they can make a real difference as long as you are willing to cede authority to them. It is a good time to join hands.
	 Jan 20 - Feb 18	Try not to worry too much about other people – you need privacy more than anything else and there is only one way you can reliably get that. See if your friends and family will back off.
	 Feb 19 - March 20	You are in a good place to start new arrangements – especially if they are legally binding. A lease, a new job and even a marriage should go well if it starts now. Do not be afraid.
	• Provided by Astrology.com (www.astrology.com)	

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)
AM
6.40 Pawn Stars 18
7.05 Storage Wars 11
7.35 The Pickers 9
8.30 Counting Cars 7
9.30 The Tesla Files
10.25 History Drama: Project Blue Book
11.20 Ancient Aliens 10
PM
12.15 The Curse Of Oak Island 5
1.10 Kingpin
3.00 The History Hustle
3.30 The Curse Of Oak Island 5
4.25 Ancient Aliens 10
5.20 History Drama: Project Blue Book
6.15 Crimes That Shocked Asia 2
9.00 Kingpin
LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)
AM
6.00 Bring It! 2
7.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
PM
12.00 Married At First Sight Australia 4
3.00 Chris Bohjalian's Secrets Of Eden
4.35 Seatbelt Psychic
5.00 Born This Way 2
6.00 Tiny House Nation
7.00 Gok's Fill Your House For Free
8.00 Little Women: Terra's Big House
9.00 Project Runway: Fashion Startup
10.00 Michael Jackson: Searching For Neverland
HBO (CHANNEL 601)
AM
6.00 Bedtime Stories (PG)
7.40 Lady Bird (NC16)
9.10 Knight And Day (NC16)
11.00 O.G. (PG)
PM
12.50 Jumper (NC16)
2.15 Game Night (NC16)
3.50 Cars (2006) (PG)
5.45 Puss In Boots (2011) (PG)
7.15 Rampage (NC16)
9.00 Transformers: The Last Knight (NC16)
11.30 O.G. (PG)
AM
1.20 Girls Trip
3.20 Payback (PG)
4.55 Save The Last Dance (PG)
CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)
AM
6.05 Willard
7.45 Locusts: The 8th Plague

9.10 The HBO Movie Show
9.40 The LX.D: The Uprising Begins
11.05 The Art Of War
PM
1.00 Kidnap (NC16)
2.35 The Game Plan
4.25 Spy Kids 3: Game Over
5.50 The Perfect Storm
8.00 Paycheck
10.00 Pulp Fiction (M18)
AM
12.30 Looking Glass (NC16)
2.15 Scream 3 (M18)
4.10 Indecent Proposal
HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)
AM
6.33 Wok Of Love (HD)
7.45 Happy Camp 2 (HD)
9.30 Stay Healthy Stay Happy 4 (HD)
10.30 Momo's Paradise 4 (HD)
11.00 Pleasant Goat And Big Big Wolf – Flying Island: The Sky Adventure (HD)
11.30 Young Travellers' Survival Handbook (HD)
PM
12.00 Follow Me 8 (HD)
12.30 Perfect Match 6 (HD)
2.00 Maritime Silk Road
3.00 Real Hero (HD)
4.30 Taste Taiwan 3 (HD)
5.00 Liao Zhai 4 (HD)
7.00 Stay Healthy Stay Happy 4 (HD)
8.00 I Am The Actor (HD)
10.00 Sweet Dreams (HD)

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)
AM
8.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2019
9.00 Tennis: Federation Cup By BNP Paribas 2019 First Round: Czech Republic Vs Romania
PM
2.00 Tennis: ATP Champions Tour 2018
2.30 Spirit Of Yachting 2018
3.00 Asean Basketball League 2018/19
5.00 Tennis: ATP 500 Rio Open Presented By Claro 2019
8.10 Football: Ladbrokes Scottish Premiership 2018/19
10.30 Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered 2019
11.00 Tennis: Federation Cup By BNP Paribas 2019 First Round
AM
12.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2019
1.00 Extreme Sports: World Surf League 2018: Billabong Pipe Masters Highlights
2.00 Motorsports: 2018 Monster Energy FIM Speedway Of Nations Finals 1: Wroclaw, Poland Highlights
3.00 Motorsports: 2018 Monster Energy FIM Speedway Of Nations Finals 2: Wroclaw, Poland Highlights

4.00 Tennis: ATP 500 Rio Open Presented By Claro 2019
HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)
AM
6.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
7.00 Football: EFL Carabao Cup 2018 Semi-finals 2, Leg 2: Chelsea Vs Tottenham Hotspur
9.00 Wrestling: WWE Bottomline (PG)
10.00 Asean Basketball League 2018/19: Mono Vampire Vs San Miguel Alab Pilipinas
PM
12.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
12.30 Football: EFL Championships 2018 Matchday 34: West Bromwich Albion Vs Sheffield United
2.30 The Football Review
3.00 Wrestling: WWE Afterburn (PG)
4.00 Asean Basketball League 2018/19: Singapore Slingers Vs Westports Malaysia Dragons (Live)
6.00 Asean Basketball League 2018/19: Saigon Heat Vs CLS Knights Indonesia (Live)
7.55 Football: EFL League One 2018 Matchday 34: Luton Town Vs Coventry City (Live)
10.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
10.30 Magazine: Trans World Sport 2019
11.30 Fiba World Basketball 2019
AM
12.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
12.25 Football: EFL Carabao Cup 2018 Finals: Chelsea Vs Manchester City (Live)
2.30 Wrestling: WWE Afterburn (PG)
3.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
4.00 Magazine: National Icon 2019
4.30 Asean Basketball League 2018/19: Singapore Slingers Vs Westports Malaysia Dragons

HUB SPORTS 3 (CHANNEL 204)
AM
6.30 School Of Golf 2019
7.00 Golf: Channel Academy 2019
7.30 Golf: Ladies European Tour 2019: Australian Ladies Classic Day 4
11.30 Golf: Morning Drive 2018
PM
1.30 Golf Advisor Round Trip 2018
2.00 Golf: Asian Tour 2019: ISPS Handa World Super 6 Perth Day 1
6.30 Golf: The Skill Code 2019
7.00 Golf: Sunshine Tour 2019: Dimension Data Pro-Am Highlights
8.00 Golf: Ladies European Tour 2019: Australian Ladies Classic Day 4
AM
12.00 Golf: Asian Tour 2018: ISPS Handa New Zealand Open Day 1
4.30 Golf: European Tour 2018: NBO Oman Open Day 2

Singtel TV

DISCOVERY (HD) (CHANNEL 202)
AM
6.35 Gold Rush 9
7.25 How To Build... Everything
7.50 The Mind Control Freaks
8.15 Hacking The Wild
9.05 Wheeler Dealers 14
9.55 Speed Is The New Black 2
10.45 How Do They Do It? 15
11.35 Incredible Engineering Blunders: Fixed
PM
12.25 Vietnam: Connecting East Africa
12.50 How Do They Do It? 15
1.15 The Perfect Murder 5
4.35 Disappeared 7
5.25 Vietnam: Connecting East Africa
5.50 How Do They Do It? 15
6.15 Jeremy Wade's Mighty Rivers
7.10 Ed Stafford: First Man Out
8.05 Pandamonium
9.00 Argo: Inside Story
9.55 Ed Stafford: First Man Out
10.50 Dual Survival 5
11.45 Disappeared 7
TLC (HD) (CHANNEL 254)
AM
6.35 Zumbo's Just Desserts
7.25 90 Day Fiance 6
9.05 Outdaughtered 3
10.45 Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party 2
11.35 Bizarre Foods With Andrew Zimmern 10
PM
12.25 Dr Pimple Popper
1.15 A Taste Of Hong Kong 3
2.05 The Little Couple 9
2.55 Foodie Duo 3
3.45 Jamie & Jimmy's Food Fight Club 5
4.35 Say Yes To The Dress 16
5.25 What If We Get Married?
6.15 Separated At Birth
7.10 Outdaughtered 3
9.00 Foodie Duo 3
9.55 Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party 2
10.50 Buddy's Big Bakedown
11.15 Wedding Cake Countdown With Drew And Linda
11.45 United States Of Steak

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)
AM
6.00 Criminal Minds: Suspect Behavior
7.40 Seal Team 2
8.30 Supernatural 14
9.20 Rude(ish) Tube
9.50 Asia's Got Talent 3
11.15 Identity
PM
1.00 Hawaii Five-0 9
1.55 American Ninja Warrior 8
3.45 The Amazing Race 29
4.40 Instinct
5.30 MacGyver 3
6.20 Seal Team 2

7.15 The Blacklist 6
8.10 Hawaii Five-0 9
9.05 Asia's Got Talent 3
10.25 Don't Blink
10.55 Bad Boys 2
WARNER TV (HD) (CHANNEL 306)
AM
6.00 Blindspot 3
10.10 Race To The Scene
11.50 Final Destination
PM
1.35 Lethal Weapon 3
2.25 Almost Genius
2.50 The Big Bang Theory 11
3.15 Friends 10
3.45 The Big Bang Theory 12
4.10 Young Sheldon 2
4.35 Godzilla
6.55 Unknown
9.00 Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows Part 2
11.25 Arrow 7

COMEDY CENTRAL ASIA (HD) (CHANNEL 324)
AM
6.00 The Daily Show 24
7.15 Just For Laughs Gags 14
8.05 Super Ultimate Candid Camera
8.35 Mr Bean
9.25 Brotherhood
10.20 Lip Sync Battle 4
11.15 Saturday Night Live 44
PM
12.20 Lip Sync Battle 4
12.50 Just For Laughs Gags 14
1.15 Saturday Night Live 43
2.05 All Access: Sugar Sammy
2.50 Dr Ken
3.10 Just Another Immigrant: Romesh Ranganathan
3.45 Ronny Chieng: International Student
4.20 Above Average Presents
4.30 All Access: Lilly Singh
5.15 Detroiters
6.05 Saturday Night Live 44
7.10 Amazingness
8.00 All Access: Sugar Sammy
8.45 Inglorious Pranksters
8.55 Dr Ken
9.15 Just Another Immigrant: Romesh Ranganathan
9.55 The Family Law 3
10.50 Hasan Minhaj Goatface
11.25 A Michael Jackson Celebration

JIA LE (HD) (CHANNEL 502)
AM
6.00 Stylish Man
7.00 The Legend Of Golden Music
8.00 Glorious World
8.30 The Golden Melodies 2018
10.00 All Out Of Love
PM
12.00 Stylish Man
1.00 The Golden Melodies 2018
2.30 All Out Of Love
4.30 The Legend Of Golden Music
5.30 Glorious World

6.00 Stylish Man
7.00 All Out Of Love
9.00 Super Nightclub
10.30 Top Singers

VIDEO ON DEMAND
1The Oath (HD+) (Latest)
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10.00 Dutch Eredivisie 18/19: AFC Ajax Vs NAC Breda
PM

Top 5: Prawn noodles

Hearty soup and shelled prawns

The soup that comes with prawn noodles should have the distinctive sweetness of the shellfish



Wong Ah Yoke
Senior Food Correspondent

While I enjoy the dry version of prawn noodles, the true test for this hawker dish is in the soup.

It should boast the distinctive sweetness of the shellfish that is rounded out with meat. Some stalls add pork ribs or pork tail to the broth for greater depth of flavour and a more robust taste.

Not many hawkers deliver though. Many use soya sauce or sugar to make up the flavour, but these are seasonings to lift the flavours and should not be the main flavour.

A couple of well-known stalls I used to like also turned out disappointing in the last couple of visits. The broths tasted weak, not as full-bodied as I remember them.

But there are newer stalls that have filled the gap. Some are relatively unknown and a couple are run by young people. Hopefully, they find enough incentive to stick at it despite the tough work and low margins.

You cannot judge a good prawn noodle soup by appearance either.

Some versions that look good, their stocks glistening with orange-coloured prawn oil, could taste bland or overly salty. I encountered both in the past week and I had to queue for more than half an hour for one of them.

Others may look dull in comparison and be full of umami.

Another thing that irks me about some stalls is that the big prawns are sliced lengthwise with the shell intact.

They look good in photographs, but getting the meat out is hell because it tends to stick to the shell. I end up either leaving bits of meat behind or messing up my face struggling to get everything out.

So do me a favour – either shell the prawn or leave it whole.

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1

DA DONG PRAWN NOODLES
354 Joo Chiat Road;
open: 7.30am to 2pm (Wednesdays to Mondays), closed on Tuesdays

This is my favourite, but it is not cheap.

Prices start at \$5, but there is just about enough in that bowl to line my stomach. So I usually order the \$8 or \$10 bowl, with the more expensive one having bigger prawns.

A large serving of big prawns is \$13.

The other thing is that there is very little soup. And do not even think of asking for more because there is a sign at the stall explaining that the owners do not want to dilute their stock.

What you get is a robust broth flavoured by prawns and pork.

It tasted slightly diluted when the current stallholder took over from his father a couple of years ago, but recent visits showed that standards have bounced back. But even at its weakest, it is better than many other famous stalls.

There is an option with pork ribs and I usually go for that.

Just by soaking in the broth, the tender pieces of meat changes the flavour a bit, making it even more full-bodied.

ST PHOTOS: WONG AH YOE



2

RIVER SOUTH (HOE NAM) PRAWN NOODLES
31 Tai Thong Crescent;
open: 6.30am to 3pm (Tuesdays to Sundays), 6pm to 2am (Tuesdays to Saturdays), closed on Mondays

The broth here boasts a good balance of prawns and pork, albeit slightly less full-bodied than Da Dong's. It tastes natural, with no hint of sugar or flavour enhancements.

Among its appeal is that it offers a lot of topping options such as pork ribs, pig intestines, pig's tail, abalone clam and baby abalone.

The \$6 bowl I order comes with two big prawns and two very meaty ribs. The prawns are shelled in the middle for easy eating, but are also slightly overcooked.

The ribs, on the other hand, are just tender enough to come off the bone with a slight tug and have good meat flavour.



3

PRAWN VILLAGE
01-62, Block 20 Ghim Moh Road;
open: 6am to 1.30pm (Tuesdays to Sundays), closed on Mondays and public holidays

This relatively newcomer in Ghim Moh Market run by a group of youngsters offers Penang-style prawn noodles with a slightly sweet and spicy broth.

For \$4, you get two medium-sized prawns, slices of lean pork, leek fishcake and hard-boiled egg. And I like the attention paid to the toppings.

The shell is removed from the prawns' body for easy eating, but the heads and tails are kept on. The pork is tender, not hard and dry like at many places.

And the fishcake reminds me of old-fashioned handmade varieties with its slightly springy texture – instead of the more common bouncy versions today – and it is unusual to see a bit of leek in it.

The stock could do with more body, but the taste of prawn is evident. A slightly stronger meat flavour would help. Still, it is good enough to match some big-name stalls, and without their high prices.



4

YI HAO COFFEE SHOP
Block 94 Lorong 4 Toa Payoh;
open: 4am to 2pm or when food runs out, no fixed day off

This is not one of those brand-name prawn mee stalls with long queues. In fact, it does not even have a name.

It is just a nondescript tenant in a coffee shop in Toa Payoh and does not offer big prawns like the famous places either, just decent-sized ones that are shelled and halved for easy eating. But they look and taste freshly cooked, as do the slices of pork. A bowl of noodles costs \$3.

There is an option to add pork ribs (\$4 and \$5) and the meat is tender and tasty. There is also a version with just pork tail, but I've not tried that as it does not come with prawns.

The broth has a fresh taste of prawns and pork. It tastes just a bit sugary, but as the sugar is not too obtrusive, I can live with it.

Compared with the best eateries, the stock is not as full-bodied, but better than some big-name stalls I have kept out of this list.

And for \$3, it is hard to do better.



5

SUMO BIG PRAWN
01-72, 628 Ang Mo Kio Avenue 4;
open: 9am to 11pm daily

The queues have gone, compared with when this stall opened in 2016. Then, I had to stand in line for more than half an hour. But when I went for lunch last weekend, there was only one person ahead of me.

The food is prepared by a young man and the menu offers noodles with lala (\$5), prawns (\$6.50), big prawns (\$6.50), crayfish (\$15) and lobster (\$25 to \$35). Prices seem to depend on the type of prawns used, as another sign on the side shows that the prawn version is \$5 and the big prawn one normally costs \$8.

I had tried the lobster version before and found the shellfish overcooked and unwieldy to eat. But the broth was delicious, as the lobster was cooked in it only on order.

This time, I have the big prawns version, which also has lala. The soup, understandably, does not have the bisque-like flavour, but it boasts a distinct sweetness from the prawns and clams. The absence of meat means it lacks that full-bodied flavour, but it has a clean profile that is appealing in its own way.



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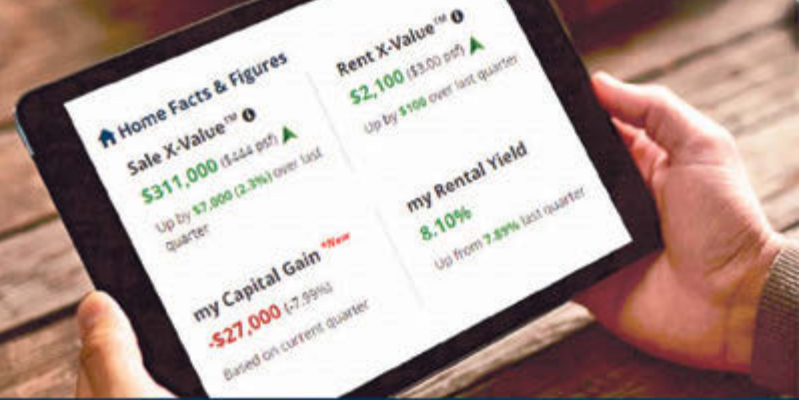


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Jewel Changi Airport officially opens in the first half of this year. The Sunday Times understands that there is a soft launch slated for mid-April.
PHOTO: ST FILE



Jewel Changi Airport

Where: 80 Airport Boulevard
Info: www.jewelchangiairport.com

There is a bite for everyone in this land where we belong. Visitors to Singapore will find this to be true soon after stepping off the plane, when they head to Jewel, Changi Airport's upcoming attraction, which is devoting more than 30 per cent of its space to food-and-beverage stores.

On the cards are a good spread of famous local eateries as well as cosmopolitan offerings from the region to as far as Norway.

Many local foodies are looking forward to the opening of big names such as New York burger joint Shake Shack and London's popular chain Burger & Lobster.

Not to mention the return of an old favourite – A&W. Coney Dogs, curly fries and root-beer floats will be back, joined by best-selling items from A&W outlets worldwide. Think cream-cheese burgers from Okinawa and Golden Aroma Chicken from Indonesia.

Jewel, a 137,000 sq m mixed-use development jointly developed by Changi Airport Group and CapitaLand, opens in the first half of this year. The Sunday Times understands that there is a soft launch slated for mid-April.

Chinese cuisine will be represented by the likes of Chongqing fine-dining restaurant Xiao Bin Lou, casual diner Yu's Kitchen and Yunnans, which offers Yunnan cuisine such as steamed pot chicken soup, braised wild porcini mushrooms and Yunnan rice noodles. In China, the brand is known as Yun Hai Yao.

Norwegian chef Geir Skeie, a Bocuse d'Or 2009 winner, will serve plenty of salmon at his restaurant Pink Fish. Salmon is the main ingredient in its burgers, wraps, salads, soups and poke bowls – with a choice of Asian-, European- or American-style flavours. This is Pink Fish's first overseas outlet – it first opened just over a year ago in Norway.

Latin-American concept Tonito – by chef Daniel Chavez of Spanish restaurant Ola Cocina del Mar at Marina Bay Financial Centre and Peruvian cevicheria Tono at Duo Galleria – features a wide selection of Mexican tacos and quesadillas as well as sandwiches such as Argentinian choripanes (chorizo sandwich) and Peruvian pan con chicharron (braised pork and sweet potato sandwich).

Jewel Changi Airport Development's head of leasing Tan Mui Neo says: "We envision Jewel to be the place where the world meets Singapore and Singapore meets the world" and the retail mix is curated to reflect this vision."

Local brands will be offering something new at Jewel.

Home-grown d'Good Cafe opens its third outlet with a colonial theme and coffee museum. New dishes include a spin on chicken rice – Hainanese Chicken Roulade & Risotto Balls – with poached chicken thighs shaped into rolls, risotto balls, foie gras instead of chicken liver and a chilli remouade; and Golden Hamachi Kama,

d'Good Cafe's third outlet features a colonial theme and coffee museum and new dishes such as Hainanese Chicken Roulade & Risotto Balls, a spin on chicken rice. PHOTO: DGOOD CAFE



Pink Fish, by Norwegian chef and Bocuse d'Or winner Geir Skeie, will feature plenty of salmon in burgers, wraps, salads, soups and poke bowls.
PHOTO: PINK FISH



Tuck into Argentinian choripanes, or chorizo sandwiches, at Latin-American concept Tonito, which also features a wide selection of Mexican tacos and quesadillas. PHOTO: TONITO



London's popular chain Burger & Lobster is opening its first outlet here at Jewel Changi Airport. PHOTO: BURGER & LOBSTER



Tokyo Milk Cheese Factory will open its biggest outlet, which seats up to 15 people. It will serve soft serve and sundaes, milk choux pie and a range of its popular cookies. PHOTO: TOKYO MILK CHEESE FACTORY

which is yellowtail dressed in salted egg yolk emulsion and served with seaweed crackers.

Rising star chef Koh Han Jie, 25, the first Singaporean to win the prestigious Young Talent Escoffier Asia culinary competition last year, will helm El Fuego by Collins, a halal European restaurant in collaboration with veteran chef Edmund Toh and chef Collin Ho, founder of the Collin's restaurant chain.

Culinary doyenne Violet Oon will open her largest restaurant yet – at more than 350 sq m – offering local delights including dry laksa, beef rendang and satay.

Paradise Group will park three of its popular brands at Jewel – steam-boat restaurant Beauty In The Pot, noodle bar LeNu and casual restaurant Paradise Classic.

Also at Jewel are roast meat specialist Kam's Roast, Hong Kong dim-sum chain Tim Ho Wan, all-day dining venue Prive and Sama Sama, the new upmarket sister outlet to Indonesian soup house Tok Tok at 313 Somerset.

For desserts, there is Hokkaido soft-serve store Naganuma Ice Co. Swiss chocolate brand Laderach and Tokyo Milk Cheese Factory, which will open its biggest outlet here seating up to 15 people. The outlet will serve Cow Cow Ice (soft serve and sundaes), Cow Cow Kitchen (milk choux pie) and a range of its popular cookies.

New foodie hangouts

Just two months into 2019 and the dining scene is heating up with new food enclaves to check out. The Sunday Times rounds up the offerings at these new food hangouts across the island, from the rebranded Global Kitchens in Science Park Drive in the west to the stunning new Jewel Changi Airport in the east



Eunice Quek
Food Correspondent



Watch Pasta Bar executive chef Alessandro Giustetti (above) and his team prepare homemade pasta dishes such as pappardelle with rabbit ragu, olive and pine nuts (below right). PHOTOS: PASTA BAR



KeSa House

Where: 55 Keong Saik Road
Info: www.8mcollective.com/kesahouse

The buzz is back in Keong Saik Road as the former boutique hotel Naomi Liora has been transformed into a "flexible-stay concept" called KeSa House (a combination of the name Keong Saik).

Made up of a stretch of 10 shophouses painted in Tiffany blue, KeSa House has 60 rooms as well as six restaurants and bars.

Get a taste of Barcelona at Olivia Restaurant & Lounge (01-03), which marks the return of chef and co-founder Alain Devahive, who was from the now-defunct elBulli Restaurant as well as Catalunya



Hong Kong and Singapore.

Chef Devahive's cooking remains in top form, with highlights such as monkfish (market price), black rice with calamari (\$30) and cheese cake (from \$14 a slice, order in advance, add \$28 for 5g of truffles).

Another hot spot for foodies is the new Pasta Bar (01-05), helmed by Genova-born executive chef Alessandro Giustetti. Snag a spot at the 18-seat counter,

where you can watch him and his team at work as they prepare 11 housemade pasta dishes.

Do not miss the pappardelle with rabbit ragu, olive and pine nuts (\$30); tortelli with pumpkin and sage (\$26); and lagane with chickpeas, chilli and spicy garlic (\$28) – a lesser-known rustic, egg-less pasta from southern Italy. French establishment Mag's Wine Kitchen (01-06), which starts a new chapter at KeSa House after



At least 12 restaurants have opened since last November at Frasers Tower, a new office building opposite Amoy Street Food Centre. ST PHOTO: JOSEPH CHUA

Frasers Tower

Where: 182 Cecil Street
Info: www.fraserstower.com.sg

New restaurants open all the time in the Central Business District to satisfy the corporate appetite.

And at least 12 restaurants have opened since last November at Frasers Tower, a new office building opposite Amoy Street Food Centre.

They include Preludio, which offers a fine-dining concept called Author's Cuisine.

Colombia-born chef Fernando Arevalo is the "author" offering a different "chapter" every 12 to 18 months. The first chapter is "monochrome", where the European dishes are inspired by black and white. Prices start at \$55++ for a four-course lunch.

Developed by Frasers Centrepoint, Frasers Tower is also home to the first South-east Asian outpost of mozzarella bar The Mast, which launched in Rome in 2015. The brand is known for fresh cheeses – such as mozzarella, bur-

rata and stracciatella – that are hand-stretched and shaped on-site with buffalo milk from its buffalo farm in Valle dei Templi in Paestum, Italy.

Highlights include best-seller Tris Di Bufala (\$35), a selection of burrata, mozzarella and special stuffed burrata served on schiacciata bread.

For more familiar flavours, head to modern Singaporean restaurant Relish by chef Willin Low, which offers everything from laksa pesto linguine (\$17.80) to mala papadam nachos (\$8.50) to har jeong gai

(prawn-paste chicken) frog legs (\$10).

Tomi Sushi has a new branch at Frasers Tower called Tommy's Sake Bar, offering the perfect pairing of sushi, sashimi and sake.

And if you need a quick bite, pop into places such as Cedele, Work-space Espresso, Latin-American restaurant Cuba Libre and Californian-Mexican restaurant Muchachos.

The food-and-beverage outlets are at the building's three-storey retail podium which connects to its 38-storey office tower.



Restaurant Preludio is offering "monochrome" food (above) for the first chapter of its fine-dining concept, while mozzarella bar The Mast is known for fresh cheeses (above right) that are hand-stretched and shaped on-site. PHOTOS: PRELUDIO, THE MAST



Funan

Where: 109 North Bridge Road
Info: facebook.com/funansg

Funan mall has undergone quite a lifestyle makeover. It closed in July 2016 for renovation and will reopen in the second quarter of this year.

Beauty and food-and-beverage brand Spa Esprit Group will open a three-in-one concept comprising its grooming salons Browhaus and Strip as well as its sixth Tiong Bahru Bakery outlet, which offers pastries, cakes and coffee.

The group will also open a farm-to-table restaurant similar to Open Farm Community, serving Japanese cuisine, in partnership with urban farming outfit Edible Garden City. The latter will operate a 5,300 sq ft "urban farm", where plots can be adopted for growing produce.

Home-grown coffee joint Chye Seng Huat Hardware will mark its 10th year in the scene with a new store, PPP Coffee (an abbreviation of its coffee roaster Papa Palheta). Aside from its artisan coffee selection, there will be a toast bar, pastries and Nonya kueh such as ondeh ondeh with coffee-infused gula melaka filling. There will also be a brew bar for diners to try their hand at brewing.

One new entrant to the food scene at the revamped Funan is modern Peranakan restaurant Godmama, which has been operating quietly as a private dining outfit since August last year.

Its co-owner Derrick Chew, 33, who ran the now-defunct Hyde & Co cafe in Kampong Glam, has joined forces with business partner Christina Keilthy, 60, and Per-



Modern Peranakan restaurant Godmama, which has been operating as a private dining outfit, is slated to open at Funan mall in May. PHOTO: GODMAMA SG

anakan chef Fredric Goh, 28, to make Peranakan food "accessible and affordable".

The 60-seat restaurant, slated to open in May, will offer traditional dishes such as babi assam, ayam buah keluak and egg-skin popiah. It also offers creative cocktails and desserts, such as red date pudding with a longan tea glaze – instead of the usual sticky toffee pudding.

On opening at Funan, Papa Palheta's founder Leon Foo says: "For us to find a mall that we could connect with as a brand was critical. Funan is, however, a mall unlike any other in Singapore. We found it to have ticked all the boxes and we wanted to be that go-to coffee shop that will be there for the long haul, serving and connecting people with coffee."



Take your pick of cuisines at Global Kitchens, with army stew (above) at Saranghae and pad thai (below) at Arom Thai. PHOTOS: GLOBAL KITCHENS

Global Kitchens

Where: 2 Science Park Drive
Info: www.facebook.com/globalkitchens.asia

Savourworld, which was set up to be the "Disneyland of food" two years ago, has been rebranded Global Kitchens.

It is now owned solely by founder Michel Lu, 50, after he parted ways with events company Savour's executive director Darren Chen last year.

Mr Lu has been introducing new brands since last month to replace sales and believes business will continue to pick up.

Global Kitchens is a two-minute walk from Kent Ridge MRT station and caters largely to working professionals and students in the area.

Recent openings include Chinese soup eatery TangSheng House, Japanese restaurant Mainichi No Aji and Korean outlet Saranghae.

Next month, Thai concept Arom



Thai and North Indian eatery Meso will also enter the scene.

Other brands include Thai milk tea brand Cha Tra Mue, ice cream parlour Lickitony and The Good Beer Company for craft beer.

Despite the changes, Mr Lu sees a 3 to 4 per cent increase in monthly sales and believes business will continue to pick up.

Global Kitchens is a two-minute walk from Kent Ridge MRT station and caters largely to working professionals and students in the area. He says: "The new name represents the global cuisines available and we aim to make them accessible to as large an audience as possible."

Great World City

Where: 1 Kim Seng Promenade
Info: www.greatworldcity.com.sg

The first phase of Great World City's refurbishment was completed in December last year. Diners now have more food-and-beverage options.

New brands by Chinese restaurant group Joyden Concepts include Ho Fook Hei and Four Seas Fish Grill.

Ho Fook Hei offers its signature rose wine soya sauce chicken (\$18 for half or \$34 for whole chicken), while Four Seas Fish Grill focuses on fish dishes cooked in a variety of ways – steamed, pan-fried, grilled – with a choice of sauce such as grated old ginger and spicy Nonya.

The second outlet of one Michelin-starred Hototogisu Ramen from Tokyo offers oyster ramen, something different from its first outlet at Chijmes, which specialises in ramen with a clam and pork broth.

Coffee lovers can get their fix from Mavrx Coffee Bar, which moved from its Duxton outlet early this month.

Familiar favourites such as



Ho Fook Hei's signature rose wine soya sauce chicken is now available at Great World City. PHOTO: JOYDEN CONCEPTS

Imperial Treasure Steamboat and Imperial Treasure Cantonese Cuisine, offering dim sum, have also reopened at Great World City. In June, Japanese supermarket Meidi-Ya will open, an addition to the existing Cold Storage supermarket in the mall owned by All-green Properties.

The mall's overall facelift is slated for completion by next year, in anticipation of the opening of Great World MRT station along the upcoming Thomson-East Coast line in 2021.

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Ms Candice Ong serves her roast pork belly with hand-pounded chilli sauce. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

Singapore Cooks

A crackling good time

Ms Candice Ong’s roast pork belly is a hit with family and friends

Eunice Quak
Food Correspondent

When family members are impatient to tear into a dish, you know it has to be good.

As Ms Candice Ong, 48, is busy preparing to cook sio bak (roast pork belly), her enthusiastic husband, Mr Derek Tan, 58, and 25-year-old son, Mr Joshua Tan, sing praises of her culinary repertoire.

When the meat is being carved for photo-taking for this interview, they cannot help but steal pieces of the juicy pork with perfectly crispy crackling.

Mr Derek Tan, an engineer supervisor and self-proclaimed “taster” of his wife’s food, gives his verdict in mock seriousness: “The skin is crispy and the meat is not tough. Her standard has always been consistent.”

Ms Ong, who works in private

banking, laughs and adds that her husband is a “tough critic” who does not usually give a rave review.

Her son is quick to lavish praise on her labour of love. “Whatever mum cooks, we love,” says the eldest of three siblings, who has two sisters aged 22 and 18.

It is a joy to see the family bonding and joking over their love of food. That is why Ms Ong ensures that a healthy home-cooked meal brings her loved ones together after a long day’s work.

Her sio bak is a crowd-pleaser among family and friends and she has taken great effort to perfect it. While the ingredients are simple, there are key steps to pay attention to.

For instance, having a tray of water at the base of the oven is important to maintain the meat’s moisture and collect excess oil that drips from the meat.

Adding a layer of salt and increasing the oven temperature gradually will dry out the skin to achieve the quintessential crispy pork crackling.

Ms Ong serves the succulent pork with her hand-pounded chilli sauce – a delicious combination of chillies, garlic, lime leaves and lime juice.

The same cut of pork belly can also be used to make kong bak bao (braised pork buns), another hit when she hosts family and friends.

For Chinese New Year, she prepares dishes such as pen cai and fish maw soup, as well as yusheng, with her own dressing of sour plum sauce with lime juice, chilli sauce and hua diao jiu (Chinese rice wine) or brandy.

Ms Ong, the youngest of eight siblings, honed her skills from her family of home cooks. Her mother’s speciality is braised duck and Ms Ong grew up observing her cook while helping with preparing ingredients and doing the dishes.

While baking is not her forte, she can also make muffins and cookies.

When it comes to sweet treats, she prefers making konnyaku jelly, or those found at Chinese dessert shops such as mango sago and bai guo yi mi, which is made with barley, beancurd skin and ginkgo nuts.

With her pork belly done, Ms Ong sits back and watches with glee as everyone digs into her dish.

She says: “When I see my family and friends enjoy the food, I feel happy and satisfied.”

euniceq@sph.com.sg

SIO BAK (ROAST PORK BELLY)

INGREDIENTS

2 Tbs mixed herbs
1 Tbs pepper
1 tsp salt
1kg pork belly
5 garlic cloves
8 to 10 Tbs salt

METHOD

1. In a bowl, stir the mixed herbs with pepper and salt.
2. Score the skin of the pork belly in a criss-cross direction and rub the herb blend all over at least three hours before cooking. If not, rub it one hour before, then place the pork belly in the freezer.
3. With a small knife, make small incisions into the sides of the pork belly so that you can insert the garlic cloves.
4. When ready to cook, preheat the oven to 180 deg C. Ensure you have a wire rack in the middle of the oven,

and a tray filled with water at its base. This helps to maintain the meat’s juiciness and will also collect the excess oil from the meat.

5. Place the pork belly on a baking tray (skin side up) and pat the eight to 10 Tbs of salt to form a layer on the skin. Bake in the oven for 30 minutes.

6. Take the pork belly out of the oven and carefully remove the layer of salt. Place the meat back into the oven – skin side down – directly on the oven’s wire rack to bake for another 40 minutes.

7. Turn the heat up to 220 deg C. Flip the meat – skin side up – to grill for another 30 minutes.

8. Turn the heat up again to 240 deg C for 10 to 15 minutes, until the skin is golden brown and crispy.

9. Remove from the oven and slice into 2.5cm-thick chunks. Serve immediately.

Open For Business



PHOTOS: DUCKLAND, THE MASONS TABLE, ALT. PIZZA



• Opening a restaurant? Send the details to stlife@sph.com.sg

DUCKLAND

Last month, the TungLok Group launched Duckland in United Square. It realised the potential for a restaurant that serves duck in different styles when it saw its two XiHe Peking Duck outlets here, the first of which opened in 2012, doing well.

The highlight of the 72-seater Duckland is Irish duck, bred at Silver Hill Farm in Ireland. The ducks are prepared in Asian and Western styles and all the dishes use duck fat, which is known to be monounsaturated fat that can help reduce unhealthy cholesterol levels.

Duckland’s bestseller is its roast duck (\$50++ for whole, \$28++ for half), which is served with a selection of dipping sauces – raspberry sauce, sriracha sauce and yellow mustard.

Another crowd favourite is Duck

Confit & Waffle (\$20++, above), which consists of a hearty whole duck leg and golden-brown waffle, topped with a sunny-side-up and served with maple syrup.

Other duck items include duck fried rice (\$10++), duck pie (\$6++), duck broth (\$5++) and the roast duck breast set (\$13++), which comprises Irish duck breast, duck broth and duck rice.

The restaurant also serves non-duck dishes such as Irish lamb stew (\$22++), Bacon, Cabbage & Colcannon (\$20++), Good Ol’ Fish & Chips (\$18++) and charcoal-grilled babyback ribs (\$28++ for 500g).

Where: B1-09 & 64/65 United Square Shopping Mall, 101 Thomson Road
Open: 11am to 10pm daily
Info: Call 6259-5668, e-mail ducklandusq@tunglok.com or go to www.facebook.com/ducklandsg

THE MASONS TABLE

The Masons Table, located in the City Hall and Fort Canning precinct, serves modern European food and has an extensive wine list.

It is housed in the historic Masonic Hall, which is part of the Singapore Heritage walk.

The restaurant can seat 180 people and is also suitable for cocktails for groups of up to 250 people. It has two rooms and a classic standing bar and the space can be partitioned or opened up to form a big hall.

Set-lunch specials (\$28++ for two courses and \$32++ for three courses) change weekly.

Menus can also be customised to customers’ requirements, be it vegetarian or for other dietary preferences.

A dinner can consist of its signature starter (from \$14++)

foie gras with braised pear, and pink peppercorn gastrique, followed by mains (from \$24++) such as a classic duck leg confit, potato sarladaises and citrus salad, and ending with a sweet creme brulee (desserts from \$10++).

Other mains options include torched chicken breast (above), lamb navarin, grilled striploin (250g), pan-seared baby snapper and poached salmon.

For quick snacks at the bar, choices are a charcuterie platter for sharing, pizzas or fiery honey sriracha tossed chicken wings.

Where: The Masonic Hall, 23A Coleman Street
Open: 11.30am to 10pm (Mondays to Fridays) and 3 to 10pm (Saturdays)
Info: Call 9127-5030 or e-mail info@themasonstable.com

ALT. PIZZA

Home-grown pizza chain Alt. Pizza has opened its newest 50-seat outlet at Holland Village, complete with a new look and two new pizzas.

Alt. Pizza offers four sauces to go with its sourdough pizza base: vine-ripened tomato, white bechamel, garlic pesto and hickory.

Toppings include Calabrese-style salami, Iberico chorizo, garlic prawns, housemade beef meatballs and chicken fennel sausage; cheeses such as mozzarella, parmesan, aged cheddar and feta; and vegetables such as cherry tomatoes, mushrooms, peppers and Kalamata olives.

The new pizzas (\$18++ each, available till March 31) are Rocketman (above), comprising vine-ripened tomato sauce, Calabrese-style salami and roasted

red peppers, topped with fresh rocket and extra-virgin olive oil; and Wicked Veg, a vegetarian option of roasted sweet pumpkin, cherry tomatoes, earthy garlic-spinach, parmesan and feta.

The new outlet is also offering a one-for-one deal on the brand’s signature pizzas (\$18++) until March 6, such as Truffle Shuffle, Old School and The Hangover.

Alt. Wings (\$12++ for eight pieces, \$22++ for 16 pieces) with hot wing, hickory BBQ or chilli garlic sauce, and Alt.’s Fries with Truffled Mayo (\$10++), are also recommended.

Where: 267 Holland Avenue
Open: 11am to 10pm daily
Info: Call 6219-3085 or go to www.facebook.com/AltPizza or altpizza.com.sg

Restaurant Review

Curry on, with smoked pork



Smoked Pork Curry (above) is an odd dish of house-smoked pork belly cooked in a thick curry with eggplant, lady's finger, cabbage and tau pok; and the USDA Black Angus ribeye (below) comes medium-rare and is tender and juicy, and is served with fried potato wedges and fried rice. PHOTOS: NEW UBIN ZHONGSHAN PARK

This dish, with bacon-like pork pieces, is a cross between Eurasian curry devil and fish-head curry



Wong Ah Yoke
Senior Food Correspondent

New Ubin Seafood has been on an expanding spree. After moving from Sin Ming Industrial Estate to Hillview Avenue in 2017, the zi char restaurant opened a second outlet at Chijmes last year. Then in November, it opened a third one at Zhongshan Park. But this outlet is different. It is a partnership with Ramada Hotel – with the hotel providing its chef and service staff – and it took over the hotel's buffet restaurant, Flavours At Zhongshan Park. New Ubin, however, has a problem with consistency. When it was in Sin Ming, it went through periods when the food was good, then average and good again. It retained its standards at Hillview, but all reports of the Chijmes outlet I've heard have been negative. The latest outlet, on the other hand, appears to have benefited from the hotel's involvement. The food is not only good, but the ambience and service levels are



also commensurate with what you would expect at a four-star hotel. The staff are fluent in English and do a good job recommending and explaining the dishes. In fact, my server is so enthusiastic in her recommendations that I end up ordering more food than I can eat. In terms of ambience, it's functional and everything is spick-and-span, and my only complaint is the occasional shriek from a kid at a nearby table – and that's not the restaurant's fault. New Ubin serves zi char dishes, but it also does a decent steak. There's a choice of USDA Black Angus ribeye (\$16 for 100g, minimum 500g) or US full blood wagyu (\$66 for 300g), and I'm tempted to order the wagyu. But the server persuades me to get the Black Angus instead because, she says, it's better. It comes medium-rare and is

tender and juicy. The meat is cut into cubes and served with caramelised onions and fried potato wedges, as well as a plate of "heart attack" fried rice cooked with beef drippings. The wedges are excellent and stay crispy till the end, but the rice seems rather lacklustre to me and I do not detect the aroma of beef fat. Boss Bee Hoon (\$12) is tastier. It is a simple dish of fried beehoon with egg and chye sim, almost like "economy" beehoon, but with a lot of dark soya sauce and steeped in wok hei. The rice noodles go well with Smoked Pork Curry (\$29), an odd dish of house-smoked pork belly cooked in a thick curry with eggplant, lady's finger, cabbage and tau pok. It's like a cross between Eurasian curry devil and fish-head curry, and is rather alluring, especially the bacon-like pork pieces.

Live Scottish Blue Mussels (\$36 for 300g) is listed as a starter, but the serving is bigger than some main courses in Western restaurants. The mussels are plump and, while not as sweet as I expect, get enough flavour from being cooked in white wine, butter, parsley and pepper. The broth is too oily to drink, but is ideal for dunking in slices of toast that come with the dish. Chilli crab is a signature dish here, but I prefer crabs (\$68 for 800g) cooked with white pepper. The one here is not the best I've eaten, but is still good. The sauce is tasty and does not overpower the sweetness of the crustacean, and the spring onion in it is sweet and soft. The biggest disappointment is a dish described as "to die for" in the menu. Brinjal Delight (\$15) is made with thin slices of the vegetable that are caramelised and tossed in a vinegary sweet sauce with dried chilli. What fails is that the brinjal is not crispy like it is supposed to be, but extremely chewy. The flavours are also too strong to eat the dish on its own. It could possibly be better with rice, but since we already have fried beehoon and potato wedges on the table, we decide not to overload with another carb. Still, one dud out of so many dishes is not bad.

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• Follow Wong Ah Yoke on Instagram @wongahyoke

• The Sunday Times paid for its meals at the eateries reviewed here.



NEW UBIN ZHONGSHAN PARK

Ramada by Wyndham Singapore at Zhongshan Park, 16 Ah Hood Road, tel: 6808-6846; open: noon to 3pm daily, 6 to 10.30pm (Mondays to Thursdays), 5.30 to 11pm (Fridays to Sundays)

Food: ★★★★★
Service: ★★★★★
Ambience: ★★★★★
Price: Budget from \$60 a person

Cheap & Good

No-style laksa with plenty of substance



Hedy Khoo
ST Online Editor

When a hawker stall has only two dishes on its menu, I am willing to bet that at least one is worth eating. The two items at Min Ji Laksa in Bendemeer Market & Food Centre are laksa and mee rebus. The laksa (\$3, \$4 and \$5) is so tasty, I do not regret a single mouthful of that calorific bowl of steamy coconut gravy goodness. I first chanced upon the stall at 3pm on a weekday. When I was told there was only one bowl of laksa left, I felt like I had struck the lottery. Never mind that the stall had run out of tau pok (dried beancurd puffs). It had cockles and I'm obsessed with the shellfish. I ordered an extra \$1 worth of cockles –



they tasted fresh and succulent. To replace the tau pok, the stallholder gave me extra fish cake and served that last bowl of laksa piping hot with a generous garnish of chopped laksa leaves. On a recent visit, I ordered a bowl with extra ingredients including, of course, cockles. It cost \$5. The bowl came with 1½ boiled egg, six pieces of tau pok, bouncy-

MIN JI LAKSA

01-31, Bendemeer Market & Food Centre, Block 29 Bendemeer Road; open: 7.30am to 3pm daily except for Tuesdays. It will be open on a Tuesday if it falls on a public holiday

Rating: ★★★★★

The laksa is prepared from scratch. ST PHOTO: HEDY KHOO

each time I thought I had eaten the last of them, I found another one or two nestled among the slippery, springy laksa beehoon at the bottom of the bowl. I suggest you ask for less beehoon so you have more space for the gravy. One egg is more than enough. For bowls priced \$4 and above, you get slivers of tender chicken

breast in the laksa. Taste-wise, it does not make a difference to me, but it is value for money. Stallholder Tay Swee Eng, 54, is not the original owner. In 2013, a friend introduced her to the owner, who was looking for a partner to handle the cooking as it was too physically taxing for her. Last October, she retired and Madam Tay took over the stall. The original stallholder had used quail eggs, tau pok, fish cake and cockles, but Madam Tay uses chicken eggs and her own recipe for the gravy and chilli paste. Her mother, who used to run an economy rice stall and knows how to cook curry, gave her a few pointers on cooking the gravy. Madam Tay recalls her first day of work at the stall. "The laksa turned out decent, but it was not fantastic," she says in Mandarin, with a slight grimace. "In the beginning, I did not know that the longer the gravy boiled, it'd become more concentrated and saltier. Some customers complained that my laksa was too salty. It was not easy listening to negative feedback, but that was how I improved." Over time, she learnt to balance

the taste of the gravy. She tastes the laksa at regular intervals every day, up to 10 times a day, to ensure the taste is consistent. It took her two years of refining her recipe before she achieved the results she wanted. "People ask, what type of laksa is this... is it Nonya- or Chinese-style? I tell them, this is a 'no-style' laksa," Madam Tay says, chuckling. She opens the stall at 5am, boiling the stock with chicken bones and chicken breasts and preparing the laksa rempah (spice paste) from scratch. Twice a week, she fries the spicy-sweet chilli paste. There is no avoiding the hard work if you want that taste, she says. This extends to details like peeling shallots and garlic cloves for the spice paste. "Once, after cooking laksa for a few months, I got lazy and mixed in ready-made laksa paste with my own. I did not like the results. That entire day, I was very anxious that customers would complain and I would lose my regulars. "I've learnt my lesson – no more short cuts."

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Lawry's The Prime Rib Singapore

Birthday, promotion, anniversary. When there's something to celebrate, it's best shared with the people we love, with good food and drinks. And there's no better place to do that than at Lawry's The Prime Rib Singapore.

The family restaurant at Mandarin Gallery can seat up to 170 diners and has six private dining rooms. The glass wall running along the length of the restaurant offers a clear view of Orchard Road and gives Lawry's an airy feel.

As I pondered over the size of the cut I wanted for my prime rib steak, the drinks menu with its extensive range of world wines caught my eye. Lawry's takes pride in its wine selection — its house pour will surpass expectations given its modest pricing.

The Famous Original Spinning Bowl Salad, served on a chilled plate with a chilled fork, whetted my appetite with its zingy dressing. Before I knew it, I had cleaned my plate.

A prelude to my steak was the Atlantic Lobster Tail. At Lawry's, this delectable piece of crustacean is cooked to perfection and delicious even without the dips offered. But I had to stop myself from eating another — I had gone to Lawry's for the beef, after all.

Finally, it was time for the main event and I was not disappointed. Lawry's serves up melt-in-the-mouth, USDA prime quality beef that has been aged for at least 21 days and slowly roasted.

Even fussy, young eaters will find it hard to find fault with the food, especially since it is served with much fanfare.

D9 Cakery, Hilton Singapore

A Wagyu beef leg slow-roasted for 14 hours, Moroccan meatballs and preserved lemon, laksa and orh luak (oyster omelette) are odd table fellows, but I didn't care. Especially when they were dressed to tease and part of the enhanced high-tea buffet spread at Hilton's D9 Cakery.

Its centrepiece is a 6m-long display showcasing executive pastry chef Cindy Khoo's handcrafted artisanal confections. But it is only on Saturdays from noon that D9 launches a three-hour assault on the palate with its smorgasbord of local and international delights.

Thai tiger prawns, Japanese clams and New Zealand green mussels take up the seafood bar. Chicken and lamb satay, rojak, and Singapore-style chilli crab with golden mantou (Chinese steamed buns) are among the local dishes that share the limelight. There are also sandwiches, salads, stone-earth oven pizza and pasta with a Thai twist, featuring king prawns and a tom yum flavour.

A spread of 30 dishes promised to fire up my belly well into the night. But Chef Khoo's sweet creations — a celebration of colours — were the stars of the show. Take your pick and savour each bite — especially the macarons and Opalys white chocolate with pecan — and you'll know why she is in a league of her own.

D9 is at Hilton's Lobby Level and prices for its Saturday High Tea Buffet, which includes a free flow of coffee and TWG teas, are \$48++ per person and \$24++ per child aged five to 12. Children below five get in free.



Indulge to your heart's content on local and international delights at D9 Cakery's enhanced high-tea buffet. PHOTOS: HILTON SINGAPORE

Top: The delectable Atlantic Lobster Tail. Right: Juicy USDA prime quality beef. PHOTOS: S LINA

From now till Dec 30, 2019, Citi Cardmembers can enjoy up to 40 per cent off a la carte food items at Lawry's the Prime Rib Singapore (333A Orchard Road, #04-01/31, Mandarin Gallery, Singapore 238897). Tel: 6836-3333. Terms and conditions apply.

From now till March 31, 2019, Citi Cardmembers can enjoy a Pay 2, Dine 3 promotion for the D9 Saturday High Tea Buffet at D9 Cakery, Hilton Singapore (581 Orchard Road, Lobby Level, Hilton Singapore, Singapore 238883). Tel: 6730-3392. Terms and conditions apply.

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